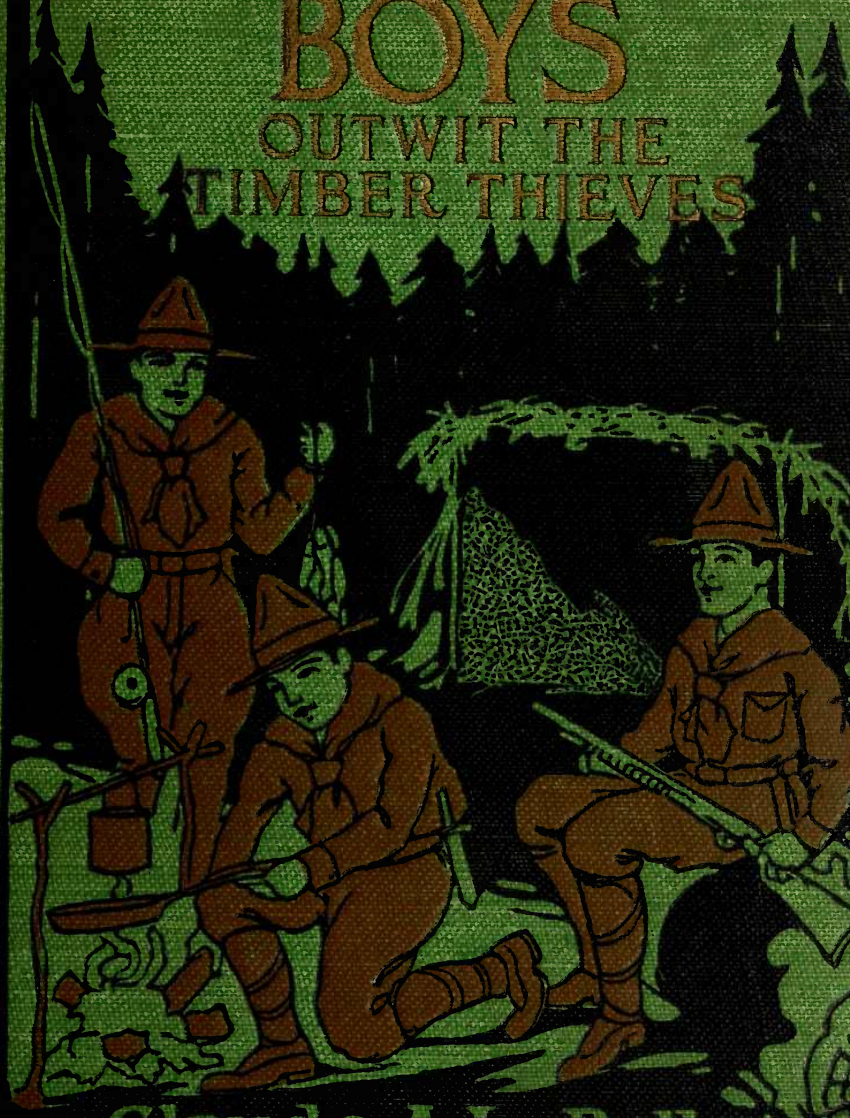
THE RANGER BOYS OUTWIT THE TIMBER THIEVES



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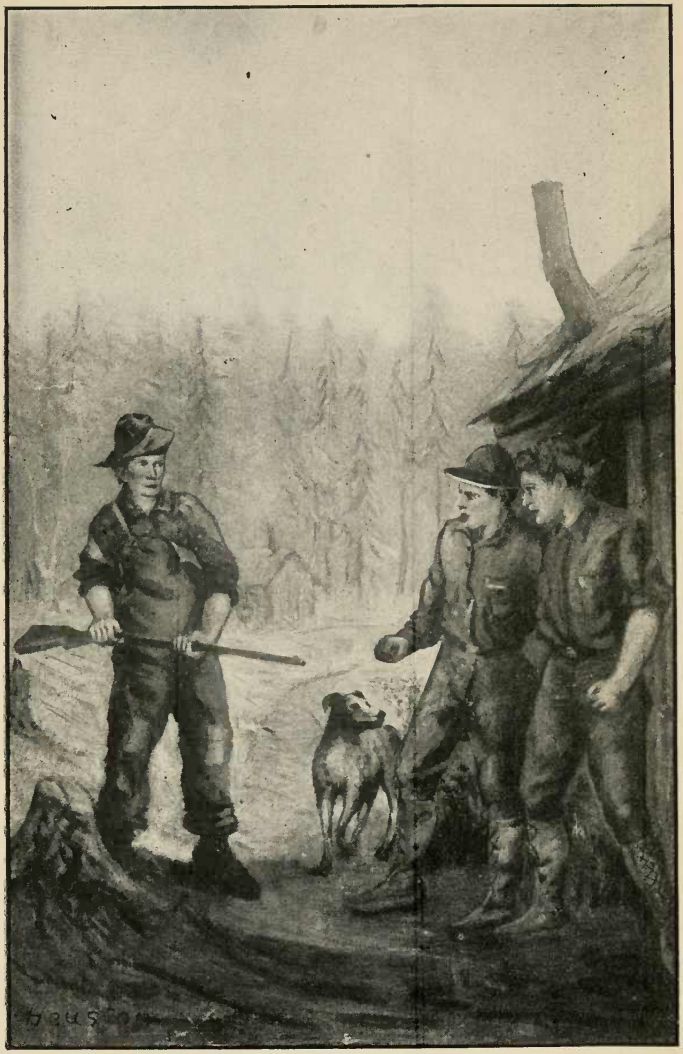

The guard let them out, and warned them that any attempt at flight would be followed immediately by a shot.

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THE RANGER BOYS OUTWIT THE TIMBER THIEVES

By CLAUDE A. LABELLE

Author of

"The Ranger Boys to the Rescue," "The Ranger Boys Find the Hermit," "The Ranger Boys and the Border Smugglers," "The Ranger Boys and Their Reward."

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THE RANGER BOYS SERIES

A Series of Stories for Boys 12 to 16 Years of Age

By CLAUDE A. LABELLE

The Ranger Boys to the Rescue
The Ranger Boys Find the Hermit
The Ranger Boys and the Border Smugglers
The Ranger Boys Outwit the Timber Thieves
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THE RANGER BOYS OUTWIT THE TIMBER THIEVES

Made in "U. S. A."

THE RANGER BOYS OUTWIT THE TIMBER THIEVES.

CHAPTER I

THE START OF NEW ADVENTURES

"BANGOR, Bangor, all change for Portland, Boston and way stations," shouted the trainman.

"Here we are, boys," shouted Garry Boone. "Wake up, Dick, let's get our packs and rifles. We will be in the station in a few seconds now. My, but I'll be glad to see Dad again. And he promises us some real action, too. I wonder what trouble he is in. You remember he hinted at something of the sort in the letter that he wrote us at Hobart."

"Well, we'll know in a few minutes now, for your father will be waiting for us at the Bangor House. Don't fret over what he wants, Garry, just be glad that we have a chance to get into action of some kind. These past few weeks have gotten me so that I am not happy if we don't have a few

scrapes to get in and out of," remarked the second of the trio of boys.

Dick Wallace, a plump, heavyset chap, yawned and rubbed the sleep from his eyes, and then got up and stretched his cramped limbs. He had been napping for more than an hour.

At that moment the train drew into the station with a screeching of brakes, and the boys, having dug out their knapsacks and rifles from between the seats where they had stowed them, soon were off the train and walking briskly toward the Bangor House.

"Why not take a car, there ought to be one along in a minute or two," half grumbled Dick. It must be explained that Dick, because of his weight, took the easiest method of doing anything whenever possible.

This does not mean that he ever shirked his duty, or that he was incapable of walking whenever he had to. As a matter of fact, he had made long hikes in the woods without ever batting an eyelash, but he believed in doing such things only when they were necessary.

"Trust Dick to want a street car and something to eat the minute he gets to a city," laughed Garry.

"Yes, I bet he is starving right now," jibed Phil Durant. "All he has had to eat since lunchtime is an apple, three bananas, and I don't know how

many bags of peanuts. If the train boy hadn't made a sale all the afternoon except to Dick he would have made a day's pay anyway."

"That reminds me that it is almost supper time now," said Dick. He had heard his chums rag him so many times about his appetite, that their remarks rolled off him as does water off a duck's back. "I move we postpone hearing what Dad Boone has to tell us until after we have eaten. Then he can tell us what he wants, and after that perhaps we can all go to a movie show."

There was no car in sight, so they continued their walk, and soon were at the doors of the Bangor House, a large, well-appointed hotel. The boys cut a strange figure as they walked through the lobby, for they were clad in broad brimmed Stetson army hats, khaki coats cut like hunters' jackets, with big roomy pockets, and khaki trousers stuffed into the tops of shoepacks, which are nothing more than heavy moccasins with an extra leather sole.

Each boy carried a knapsack on his back, and attached to this was a lariat. In addition, a stout forest hatchet was thrust through the belt that girdled them, and each boy carried a rifle.

Many curious looks were cast in their direction as they walked to the desk where Garry asked if Mr. Boone was registered there.

In a few moments the clerk had telephoned up to

Garry's father and immediately was told to send the boys up. Following in the wake of the bell boy they ascended to the room, where Mr. Boone was waiting.

He greeted the boys heartily and commented on their healthy appearance, for the sun and open air had made them as tanned as any woodsman.

Greetings over, Mr. Boone remarked:

"Before I tell you boys why I have sent for you, I suggest that we get our dinner and then come back to the room."

"Welcome words!" uttered Dick enthusiastically.

"I thought that would about hit the spot with you, Dick," laughed Mr. Boone.

"Yes," said Garry, "he is starving to death; he hasn't had anything to eat for nearly an hour and a half."

Leading the way, Mr. Boone headed the boys toward the dining room, while they unanimously ordered a fine steak, and soon were busily eating.

As they eat, let us look them over and get acquainted with them. Those of our readers who have read the three volumes preceding this one, "THE RANGER BOYS TO THE RESCUE," "THE RANGER BOYS FIND THE HERMIT," and "THE RANGER BOYS AND THE BORDER SMUGGLERS," already know our heroes. Others must be introduced.

The leader of the trio is Garfield Boone. He is

generally known as Garry. The stout boy with the long distance appetite is Dick Wallace, close friend of Garry, and ward of Mr. Boone. The third is Phil Durant, a boy of French Canadian parentage. The three boys live in a small Maine town, only a few miles from Portland, the principal city of the Pine Tree State, as our northernmost commonwealth is known.

They have just completed their junior year in high school, and it has been decided that Garry and Dick shall go to a military school the coming fall, while Phil will have to remain and finish at the high school.

Hence they wanted to spend their last vacation together, and had picked on the idea of taking a camping trip to the woods. Mr. Boone, father of Garry, who owned extensive lumber tracts in the Maine woods and was connected with some of the big paper mills of the state, came to bat with an idea that pleased the boys immensely.

It was to this effect. That instead of going on a mere camping trip which might prove to be tiresome before it was concluded, that the boys become attached to the Forest Ranger Service as an extraordinary Unit of this woodcraft outfit.

Their duties would be the same as those of the older Rangers; that is, to guard the forests from the fire peril that constantly menaced the timber

lands of the state. In this service there were two branches, the men who act as lookouts, having an unchanged station, and the patrol men who travel over a certain set course watching that fire does not start and keeping careless campers from starting fires in dangerous spots.

In a few days the boys had outfitted themselves and were on their way to their first station on the Sourdehunq Mountain, a tract of timberland owned by Mr. Boone. They had no thought of any adventure other than that which might be caused by the discovery of a fire, but on their second night on the trail they find the guide they had hired, one Jean LeBlanc, a French Canadian halfbreed, trying to steal their supplies.

They drive him away, and later find the halfbreed is inimical to them because of a fancied grievance he has against the elder Boone. They also make a staunch friend in the person of Nate Webster, an old Maine guide. Later Webster replaces the Deputy Ranger, Anderson by name, who has proved incompetent, and Anderson joins forces with LeBlanc and becomes an enemy of the Ranger Boys, and nearly succeeds in doing them great harm.

Another friend is made in the person of an old hermit, who on several occasions warns the boys of impending peril by sending them cryptic notes.

On one occasion Jean LeBlanc kidnaps the little daughter of a family by the name of Graham, who are camping in the woods. With the aid of a note from the hermit, the boys are able to rescue her and capture LeBlanc. The latter, however, escapes and makes much trouble for the boys, finally setting fire to the woods.

He and Anderson escape by climbing a sheer cliff. Still later the boys are asked by the Customs Secret Service to get evidence of a gang of smugglers on the Canadian border. This they do and the gang is seized, all except LeBlanc who dodges back across the boundary and is hence safe from arrest since he is on Canadian territory and not amenable to the United States law.

During a rainy season, they seek out the hermit and find him; that is, Dick finds him. One of their greatest adventures during the search for the gang of border smugglers is the finding, with the aid of an old map, of a tourmaline mine. The boys get a deed to the mineral rights of the land, and plan at a later date to mine the gems and make a handsome income for themselves.

It must also be explained that there is a mystery connected with Dick. His father was a college professor of geology and botany, and a classmate of Mr. Boone. He had a fall from a horse that destroyed his memory, and before an operation could

be performed, disappeared. Dick's mother had died when he was a baby, and so being without parents or home, Mr. Boone had become his guardian, bringing him up with his own son, Garry.

Now that we have a brief sketch of the boys and their previous activities, let us see what Mr. Boone's need of them is.

"Here is the whole story, boys," said Mr. Boone as they finished their dinner and returned to his room. "As you know, I have extensive interests not only in the timberland but in the mills that manufacture paper. Recently I severed connections with several of the mills, and put all my eggs in one basket, so to speak, by investing my funds all in one mill. Of course it is impossible to do business on a big scale without making many business enemies, or at least determined rivals. I have a good many such, and I have been given to understand that several of them have pooled their resources and become connected with the mills from which I withdrew my money.

"Of course I have not enough work in my one mill to take care of all the timber that I can cut, so I contract to supply other mills, necessarily becoming a rival of some of the other timber owners.

"Then, too, I have recently decided to start an experiment in summer lumbering. You know, of course, that Maine's lumber cutting season has al-

ways been in the winter because the logs could be cut and hauled over the snow to the rivers and then when the spring unleashed the ice-bound rivers, the logs could be driven down to the mills. However, I am figuring on getting out lumber for building during the summer and in the winter getting the logs for the pulp mills to grind ready for the making of paper. I have several important contracts with a time limit; that is, the necessary amount of lumber must be gotten out by a certain date else I forfeit my profit and large damages besides.

"Lately I have seen from my reports that the lumber is not being gotten out on schedule time. Whenever I come and look it over, or send a representative, everything goes like clockwork, but the moment that I turn my back a saw breaks, making a week's delay, or a tractor is broken, or something else happens. Unfortunately my financial affairs at the present time are in such shape that I must devote the greater part of my time to keeping the wheels going. This necessitates my being much of the time in Boston and New York, hence I cannot be at the cutting operations all the time.

"I have changed managers, but still no good comes of it. Now I am confident that the morale of my camp is being undermined by some business rivals, and that there is underground work of some sort going on. Since your success in getting that

gang of smugglers, the complete story of which I have already heard, I believe that you boys can find out what is going on at the camp to hinder my contracts.

"I have thought that you boys might go to the vicinity of the cutting and sawmills and camp there. You would have the freedom of the camp, as I would write the manager who you were, and then you could use your eyes and ears and see what was what.

"I should suggest that you display a great deal of ignorance about lumbering operations and sawmill work, so that your presence would not excite undue suspicion. Further than that I can give you no instructions, for if I knew what the matter was I would not have to call on you for assistance. I am simply relying on you to be able to do as good a job for me as you have done for the Ranger Service and the Customs Department. In other words, you will have to work out your own salvation, and I am sure that you can produce for me the results that I want."

Mr. Boone concluded his long explanation and then leaned back, letting the matter sink in. Then he asked, "Well, boys, what do you think of the proposition? Are you willing to undertake it? Not that there will be any danger attached, but do

you feel yourselves confident of making a success of the venture?"

The eyes of the three boys sparkled. They discounted Mr. Boone's belief that there would be no danger attached, for they felt that the proposition offered a chance for much excitement, and this was what they wanted. Thrilling adventures were for them the spice of life after what they had experienced that summer. Garry answered for the others. "Will we do it? You bet we will, and we'll succeed!"

CHAPTER II

TO THE RESCUE

AFTER the conclusion of their talk with Mr. Boone, the boys went out to take in a motion picture show, after finding there would be time to see the last performance.

On the way to the theatre, they stopped for a moment to watch a street fakir selling knives under the flaring light of a gasoline torch.

"Here you are, here's a fine knife with your name and address inlaid in the handle!" he was shouting.

"I think I'll get one of those for myself," said Dick to his chums.

"What do you want of one, you have your good heavy scout knife, haven't you?" queried Garry.

"Oh, I just want it as a curiosity for use when we come out of the woods; we won't want to carry a great knife like that in civilian clothes," replied Dick.

"We'll miss the first of the show if you wait," remarked Garry.

"Let the youngster have his way, Garry," interrupted Phil with a laugh.

The street salesman made the name plate and quickly screwed the transparent handle back on the knife. Dick handed over the money and soon they were on the way to the movies.

They received a fine surprise when they reached there, for the picture being shown was one in which they had taken small parts when they encountered a crew of motion picture actors while they were at their first station in the woods, and when they had some stirring adventures the time Jean LeBlanc set fire to the woods, the motion picture people had been rescued by the boys. The picture was a decidedly good one and they enjoyed it.

The chums chattered during the play in a subdued tone, especially when there flashed on the screen the parts where they were playing roles. The water scene where Dick did some fine swimming was particularly good.

After the picture was over, they edged out through the crowd and returned to the hotel and were about to go up to their rooms when Garry had an idea.

"Say, boys, we are not going on such a secret affair now that we cannot have Sandy with us, so I am going to telegraph Nate and ask if he will

bring us the dog tomorrow, or let us know by wire if he cannot."

Sandy was the big Airedale dog owned by Garry, a canine that possessed almost as much sense as some humans. When they had gone on their mission to the border to capture the smugglers, they had left the dog in Nate's keeping, as they were afraid that the sight of the dog would bring to mind who they were to any of their enemies, and they had made several in the course of their sojourn in the Maine woods.

To speak was to act with Garry, and he promptly made his way to the desk where the familiar blue lettered lamp was aglow.

The work of writing the message was short and then they went to their rooms, first stopping in to say good night to Mr. Boone, and advising him to see the motion picture the next day so that he could see them in their small parts.

This Mr. Boone promised to do, and soon all were sleeping the sound sleep of healthy boys with never a worry or care.

Morning came, and with it the boys arose and hastened to the dining room to make the most of the brief opportunity that they would have for the excellent hotel fare. They spent a part of the forenoon in overhauling and looking over their radiophone equipment to see that it was all in perfect

condition, for they had a hunch that it would come in very useful when they arrived at the cutting tract. This was to be proven true at a later date.

About ten o'clock they received a wire from Nate saying that he would arrive in Bangor about noon and would bring the Airedale with him. True to his promise in the telegram, the old guide appeared at the hotel shortly after the noon hour set in and with him was Sandy. The boys were seated in some of the arm chairs that dotted the lobby, and in less than a moment the dog had found his friends, and nearly knocked over half a dozen people in his haste and eagerness to reach the trio, for despite the fact that an Airedale is called a one man dog, he distributed his friendship equally among the three chums.

The boys were fully as glad to see their four-footed friend as he was to welcome them, and they cuffed and patted him strenuously.

"Wall, boys, there's your pup, safe and sound as the day I took charge of him. And let me tell you, he is some dog. Saved me a considerable sum of money tother day, too," announced Nate.

"Tell us about it," asked Garry, as the three crowded around the old "State of Mainer" and shook hands with him heartily.

"There ain't a whole lot to tell, 'cepting that a few days ago I sold a small tract of land that I

had to a queer old codger who doesn't believe in banks, and who paid me in bills. I believe in banks myself, but it was late when I made the deal so I had to stow the money away in the house. I locked it up as well as I could in a small desk in the sitting room, and went on to bed. 'Bout twelve o'clock I heard a tearing around downstairs and Sandy barking fit to raise the dead. I hopped downstairs as soon as I could reach for a rifle that stood in the corner of my bedroom, just in time to see Sandy going through an open window. I chased out after him, but someone was just driving away in an automobile as I got out of the window. Sandy ran the car down the road a piece, but came back beaten and tuckered out. He was fast, but not quite fast enough to catch the car, going at the rate it was. Wall, I got back in through the window and looked around. The window had been forced open, and the burglar was just evidently about to force open the desk, for there were scratches about the lock and a heavy screwdriver was laying on the floor. I figure Sandy heard him from the kitchen, where he generally slept, and came in and drove him off just in time to save my money. So that's all there is to that, but he is a mighty fine dog, and I hate to let go of him, even to his owner."

The boys patted Sandy again and again as they listened to Nate's story.

"Did you find any trace of the robber?" asked Garry.

"Nary a sign except the footprints on the lawn under the window. I figure it must have been someone that knew I got paid for the land that evening, and that I kept a little valuable stuff in the desk, but there is no proof or nothing to work on to determine who it might be. I don't care anyway, as long as the invader didn't get my money," replied Nate.

The boys invited Nate to lunch with them, and this invitation he accepted, and calling Mr. Boone they went into the dining room. In a few moments they were joined by "Moose" Boone and the greeting between the two old friends was pleasant to see.

During the luncheon hour they told Nate of the new work the boys were going on, and while he expressed himself as sorry that they were not immediately going back on the fire patrol, he agreed that they, if anyone, could solve the mystery of the stolen timber and mishaps at the logging camp.

After luncheon the boys decided that since a day or two extra would not make any great difference in their plans, they would walk to the camp instead of riding in the hot stuffy train. They decided to start that afternoon, as soon as the sun began to lower, and make about ten miles of their fifty mile

journey, sleeping out under the open as soon as it got too dark to walk any farther.

Garry's father agreed that they could take what little extra time was needed to walk, and so it was settled.

The first business of the afternoon was to visit a large grocery store and purchase enough provisions to last them on the trip, for they would do their cooking over an open fire along the way.

"We'll just buy enough to carry us over for two days, for we ought to reach the logging camp by late afternoon of the day after tomorrow," announced Garry, the chosen leader of the trio on all expeditions.

"This suits me to a T," remarked Dick. "Then we won't have to carry so much extra stuff in our packs, and in this hot weather a few pounds saved is a boon."

"Trust Dick not to want to carry too heavy a pack," laughed Phil.

"That's nothing to laugh about," protested Dick hotly, "that's just good common sense. It's ——"

Then he perceived that his chums were ragging him a bit so he grinned and turning on his heel started for the door, followed by the two laughing boys.

The buying of the groceries took but a short time,

and soon the bags were packed and they were ready for their trip.

Goodbyes were said to Nate and Mr. Boone, and the trio set out on their long hike.

"Good luck, boys, and I sincerely hope that you find what you are looking for, because my affairs are in a ticklish position just at present and unless I find the cause of the disturbance and thefts at the camp, I will be in a very serious way," said Mr. Boone as he shook hands with the three boys.

"Guess they can settle the matter if anyone can," remarked Nate as he bade the boys goodbye. "They have done some pretty fine work for boys lately and I look to see them get to the nigger in the wood-pile and roust him out pretty shortly. Then mebbe they can come back and take over the patrol for the rest of the summer.

"We're good for about eight miles tonight, fellows," said Garry as they started, "for it will be at least three hours before it gets too dark to walk any farther," said Garry.

"Have you the route all set in your mind?" asked Phil.

"Yes, I looked over a road map very carefully this morning, and the manager at the hotel garage gave me some other directions so that we cannot go very far wrong," answered Garry.

They passed well out of Bangor and were going

along a country road, just as the sun was setting, when a chugging automobile was heard back of them. Soon a ramshackle old flivver drew up near them, driven by a young farmer lad.

He sized up the boys, then stopped his machine and asked:

"Going far?"

"On to Colter," answered Garry.

"Gosh, that's a pretty good spell to walk," answered the farmer boy. "I'm going on about four miles more; would you like a lift for that distance?"

"You bet we would," broke in Dick.

This brought a laugh from the others, and they accepted the lift, for it meant saving almost an hour on their way.

They piled into the old flivver, and soon were rolling speedily along the road. Despite its aged and decrepit appearance the car made excellent time, and the boys commented on this.

"Yep, she's a pretty good old boat," answered the boy. "I don't have much time to tinker with the looks of the thing on the outside, but I manage to keep the engine in pretty good condition. You can't keep a farm car looking up to time every minute. Well, I turn in here in a minute, so I guess this is as far as you can ride, unless another car comes along. Will you come in and have a bite to eat?"

The chums thanked him cordially but refused his invitation, saying that they would cook their own meal an hour or so later.

Garry looked up at the sun and then remarked to his chums:

"It will be dark in two hours, and we can make just about six miles in that time without exerting ourselves too much. We haven't done much of anything all day so if we want to let out a bit we can tack on an extra mile in that time and so save ourselves a bit of extra walking tomorrow. Let's go."

Hitching up their packs, the trio of chums set off at a brisk pace. The setting of the sun made it much cooler and the walking was pleasant. They passed through a small village and were well on the outskirts where the houses were beginning to get scattered. and they were deciding how far to procede before picking a spot to camp for the night when they heard a call for help and the sounds of a scuffle. In the gathering gloom they could not see where the trouble was, but hastening towards the spot from where the voices seemed to come, they approached a bend in the road, and turning, saw two men attacking a third.

The attackers seemed to be rough specimens of humanity, while the third was a young man, fairly well dressed. This gave the affair the aspect of a robbery instead of a quarrel among a lot of ruffians,

so calling his chums to hurry, Garry threw his rifle to his shoulder and shouted to the attacking party to throw up their hands.

The surprised thugs took one look at the business like rifle in Garry's hands, and then deciding that they might perchance overpower him seemed to be on the verge of rushing toward him when Phil and Dick turned the bend in the road. Seeing that they were outnumbered, and with no thought of the fact that the boys might fire on them, they turned on their heels and ran. Garry was about to send a shot flying after them when the young man who had been the subject of the attack called to Garry to let them go.

Just then he toppled over and fell at full length at Garry's feet.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW ALLY

GARRY hastily unstrapped his canteen and unloosing the stopper, poured some of the water on the man's face. At the same time, Dick, showing a surprising amount of speed for one so undeniably stout, sprang to help Garry and unloosed the man's shirt collar.

In a few moments the man had been revived, and when he had come to, Garry asked him if he had been shot or stabbed or wounded in any way.

"No," replied the man weakly. "One of those jacks hit me on the head with a club, and I guess I just got groggy. I wonder if you boys could help me home, I live a few hundred yards down the road."

"Indeed we will, you wait just a moment and we will improvise something to carry you on," replied Phil.

"No, you won't have to do that, just give me an arm to lean on; that will do very nicely."

The boys did as he wished, and in a few minutes of easy walking they came to a neat little cottage, set back a few yards from the door with a number of flower beds scattered over the little lawn.

"Oh Grace," called the man, and soon a pretty young woman came to the door. When she saw her husband, for so he proved to be, leaning on the arm of Garry she flew down the path and asked anxiously what was the matter.

"Nothing at all. Just wait till we get in the house and I will tell you all about it," said the stranger. Then turning to the boys, he asked them to come in.

Anxious to hear what the cause of attack was, and why the man had wanted the rascals to escape, the trio accepted his invitation, and soon were sitting in the attractive little living room of the cottage.

"Now I suppose you boys who so kindly helped me out of a nasty hole would like to know what the whole business is about, wouldn't you?" asked the owner of the cottage.

"We are rather curious," answered Garry speaking for the others.

"My name is Howells, Arthur first name, generally called Art by my friends, and I am a timber scaler by occupation. I am scaling on the Boone cutting a few miles from here, and the chaps who attacked me were, until a few days ago, lumber jacks employed on the cutting. One morning I found

them 'spiking a tree,' and forthwith sent a report to the office with a demand that they be fired. For that reason they met me tonight and attempted to get satisfaction by giving me a sound beating. Perhaps it would have been worse had you boys not come along so opportunely. I don't think they would have murdered me, but could have easily put me out of commission so that I could not work, and that is one thing that I must do now of all times."

"But why did you want us to let them escape. I should think you would have wanted them put safely under lock and key for such an unwarranted attack," demanded Garry.

"Yes, Arthur," chimed in his wife. "I would have had them arrested and given a good long sentence. They might have killed you or crippled you."

"There's just one reason. One of them was Dave Pingree, son of old Daddy Pingree who lives in the village near here. You know the son is a worthless scoundrel, but old Daddy has had so much trouble that I didn't want to bring any more on him by having his son arrested, bad as he is, and as richly as he deserves to be jailed. The other one was a stranger to these parts, half breed Canadian by the name of LeBlanc, who picked up Pingree somewhere in the woods, and who has been his constant companion for the past few weeks, at

least since the cutting operations of the Boone tract were started," concluded Howells.

The three boys were so startled at the sound of the name LeBlanc that they jumped to their feet simultaneously and asked Howells to repeat the name.

"LeBlanc is the name. But why does that surprise you so?" queried Mr. Howells in surprise.

"What is his first name," demanded Garry without answering the question.

"On the payroll he is listed as Baptiste."

"We did not get a very good look at him in the dusk," said Garry. "Would you mind describing him for us, please. This is a peculiar situation, and we will tell you about it after you have described the man," answered Garry rather agitatedly.

"Why he is a swarthy chap about twenty-seven or eight, just about the same age as Pingree. He has black hair and mustache, and a jagged scar on one side of his neck, probably a knife wound from some lumber camp fight," answered Howells.

"Garry sank back with a sigh of relief.

"At any rate he is not the man we think he is. The scar and the age settle that, although the rest of the description fits him well enough to make him a brother to Jean LeBlanc, the one man we do want to run across in this neck of the woods," replied Garry.

"Well, not that I want to raise any apprehension on your part, or tell you something that is displeasing to you, he is a brother of a man called Jean LeBlanc. I happen to know that this is so, for one night the lumberjacks were wrestling in front of the bunkhouse and boasting about their exploits, when this Baptiste came up and succeeded in throwing several of the men with a rather vicious hold. After he had thrown several of them he started boasting about his brother Jean, who had taught him the hold. I was standing at one side watching the wrestling, which is how I happened to overhear the matter. But why does the name of LeBlanc bother you so?" he asked in conclusion.

"That's a rather long story," answered Garry and perhaps I had better start by telling you our names. These are my chums, Phil Durant and Dick Wallace, while my name is Garfield Boone, generally called Garry for short."

"I don't suppose you are any relation to the Mr. Boone who owns this tract where the summer logging is going on are you? Most people of that name in this state are somewhat related. In fact I am a second or third cousin of his myself," said Howells with a smile.

"Yes, I happen to be his son," answered Garry.

"Well, that is a coincidence. I suppose you are going on to take a look at the cutting aren't you.

This being your vacation time probably you are camping and travelling around a bit," and Howells glanced at the knapsacks and rifles which the boys had stacked near the door in the hall and which could be plainly seen from the living room.

Dick was about to say something when he caught a meaning glance from Garry, which was also seen by Phil, and which the boys interpreted as a desire on the part of Garry to do any necessary explaining that might have to be done.

"Yes, we were in this vicinity and thought that we would like to see how the experiment in summer cutting was coming along," he told Howells.

"That's fine, then I shall see you around there a good deal as I am scaling. Of course coming from a lumbering family, I don't need to tell you that scaling means measuring the timber that is cut. I also do quite a bit of timber cruising, which, as you know, means travelling through the cutting, marking the trees that are fit to be cut. Your father is very particular about his lumbering, and he doesn't do as many of the other timber owners do, sweep clean through a tract of land, and make it worthless as timber land for years to come. His having certain trees marked for cutting means that every year there will be a growth suitable to cut and market and thus he is assured of a steady income from his tracts."

"Perhaps if you are not too busy every day, you could show us something of the lumbering operations. Although as you say, I come from a 'lumber family,' I don't know a great deal about timber cutting. About the only time I have ever been at the camps was at the spring drive, just to see the fight for the river, and neither of my chums know any more about it than I do. The first thing I would like to know is what did you mean by 'spiking a tree?' " asked Garry.

"I don't know that I can explain that to you without having you near a piece of big timber to demonstrate what I mean, but I will try and tell you as best I can. There is a certain way to cut a tree, or rather there is a certain place where one always starts to cut. This place is determined by the diameter of the tree. If the tree is two feet thick, the cutter measures up two feet from the ground to start his cut. Of course he does not measure it exactly, but long experience has taught him to estimate almost within an inch where to start. You know some trees are cut by axe; those are the smaller ones, but the bigger ones are sawed nearly all the way through, and then the axemen cut through just enough with their axes to cause the tree to break off and fall. 'Spiking a tree' means to take an estimate where the sawyers will start, and then drive several spikes in, using a nail set to

drive them into the tree out of sight. The hole left will close up very rapidly, or a little dirt and moss can be stuck in so cleverly as to defy detection."

"But what harm does that do? I suppose it might kill the tree, but what difference does that make, since it is going to be cut down directly?" quizzed Phil who was an interested listener.

"It doesn't harm an old tree, but this is what it does, or rather figure it out for yourselves. What happens when the saw strikes three or four heavy spikes, set in the tree just in the path of the blade?" asked Howells.

The truth flashed over the three boys in an instant, and immediately they felt that they accomplished one purpose of their mission to the woods. They had discovered one of the reasons for the delay in the cutting. If several saws were to be spoiled that meant a delay in getting new ones.

"Now here are two other things that a spike in a tree will do. If spikes are driven in young trees, several of them, that is trees that won't be cut for a few years, it means that it will cause the core or heart of the tree to rot or break the grain. Then when the tree is finally cut, a part of the lower trunk, or best part of the tree for lumber purposes, shatters just like so much glass when it falls. That's one thing a spike will do. Now here's another

thing. Suppose that the mischief maker does not drive his spikes in the tree where the cut will be made, but climbs up twenty or thirty feet or so, and drives a dozen or two in different parts of the trunk of the tree. The tree trunk is cut safely and then it is drawn to the sawmill where it is sawed into planks. What happens when one of the big, expensive circular saws rips through a dozen spikes? It's just goodbye to the saw and goodbye to a lot of money, and means a delay of several minutes until the saw can be replaced with another. And when you are cutting timber on a time contract with a penalty for every day's delay overtime that you take, a half an hour or so lost through trouble with your sawmill means a big thing. Then there are two other dangers. One is that the saw will fly off and hurt the millmen when it hits the spikes, and the other is that it sometimes will cause serious defects in the entire machinery, so that instead of just a few minutes' delay to change saws, you waste a day or maybe two in repairing the machinery. So that's that." Howells concluded his long description of all the trouble one little handful of spikes could do, and then he looked rather searchingly at the boys. Finally he seemed to have decided in his own mind to say what he was thinking and he looked at Garry.

"I wonder if your father has any idea that some-

one is trying to hurt his business? I don't believe for an instant that those two scoundrels were driving those spikes just to make mischief. There is something deeper than that behind the whole business. There are scores of petty accidents occurring every week that all mean delay. Sometimes when the delays are totalled up they equal nearly half a day, and in one summer that means a long delay. a matter perhaps of two weeks. That two weeks is sufficient to spoil the contract and take all the profit away, but more than that, it means a loss of capital invested, for I happen to know that your father is cutting under a contract that provides a heavy penalty for failure to deliver goods as they are called for."

Garry debated with himself for a few moments, wondering whether or not to take Howells into his confidence and enlist his help. He realized that Howells, if he were honest as he seemed, would be an invaluable aid in discovering what the trouble at the camp was. His knowledge of timbering was extensive, Garry could see that with half an eye, and Garry understood that he and his chums could see lots of things happening right under their noses and never guess the malicious significance of the happenings.

As he thought, Mrs. Howells settled the question for him. Reaching down to one of the shelves

in the library table about which they were sitting, she produced an album.

"We are just old fashioned enough to have a family album," she laughed. "I thought perhaps you would like to see a picture taken of your father a great many years ago," and turning to one of the pages she showed Garry a picture that he recognized immediately. It showed his father with a sweet faced woman. "That is your father and Mr. Howells' mother. She was his favorite cousin and she died a long time ago. This has always been in Arthur's possession."

Garry remembered having seen a counterpart of the picture at home a long time ago, and he decided that the timber scaler was not claiming any false relationship.

"I wonder how it is that we have never seen you before," he asked, turning to Howells.

"Easy, we went west when I was a youngster, and it was only this spring that we came back to Maine. I did not say anything about my relationship, for I want to go on my own hook, I am a graduate of a forestry school, and I wanted to get actual experience in the woods, which was why I asked for and received the position of timber scaler. I like to stand in my own shoes, and so I said nothing about my relationship to the manager at the camp. Then, too, I need money, as I have a small interest in

a little tract of young timber, and I am paying on it a little at a time. By the time it is completely paid for it will be ready to cut, and there will be a handsome profit on the investment," he answered.

For a boy of his age, Garry was a pretty shrewd judge of character, and he had been sizing up young Howells while he was talking. So he made up his mind to take him into his confidence in a limited way, and so remarked:

"Yes, my father does know that there is something wrong at the camp, but he cannot put his finger on the spot where the trouble is. Every time he visits the camp things go along as smooth as clockwork, but it is impossible to put in all this time at this one thing when he has so many other irons in the fire. We thought that perhaps we could visit the camp for a while and find out what is wrong, and report to him so that he could remedy the trouble. But after hearing your story of the attempted spiking, I am beginning to think that the job is almost too much for us to handle. That would have been something I would never have dreamed of, and if the enemies in the camp, for enemies there must be, know a trick like that, they must have a bagfull of others of which we know nothing. So you see that in a way we are helpless, and I am going to ask that you aid us in this. I can promise for my father that in case your aid is instrumental

in locating the trouble that it will not be forgotten. What do you say? Will you help us?"

"Indeed I will," and Howells thrust forward his hand. "You can count on me to the last ditch!"

"Thanks," said Garry as he took the proffered hand. "Now there is one thing to do, and that is to make sure that Baptiste LeBlanc is not in these parts any more, for wherever the name of LeBlanc gets hitched up with us there is trouble brewing!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PERIL OF THE CIRCUS

MRS. HOWELLS pressed the boys to remain for supper, saying they would find it much more pleasant to eat in the house than to cook by the roadside somewhere. It had got quite dark at this time, and so they decided to accept the invitation so cordially given.

The fine meal was soon served, and as they ate, Garry told of some of their adventures with Jean LeBlanc, in order to explain why they were so startled when that name was first mentioned by Howells.

Supper over they talked for some time and then Garry proposed to his chums that they get their packs and journey on for a bit till they could find a place to throw their blankets for the night.

The Howells protested vigorously at this, but could offer them nothing as their cottage was not large enough to accomodate them.

The boys laughed and said they were so used to

sleeping in the open that it would never hurt them. "If you are bound to sleep outdoors you can use the back yard or you can spread your blankets on the living room floor," said Howells. "One can take the couch there. You'll have to toss for it, though."

After much pressure the boys decided to do this, and accordingly goodnights were said. It was a custom of the boys to draw lots to settle all arguments, so hustling into the kitchen Garry raided the broom of three straws of unequal length and then brought them back for his chums to draw.

Dick was the lucky chap to get the couch. With a grin he spread his blankets and remarked to the others that he hoped the floor would not be too hard.

"What's the diff?" inquired Phil. "There isn't much differenece between the ground and a floor and we aren't in the woods so we can't cut branches to make one of nature's mattresses with. Stop your chatter. I'm off to sleep," and indeed he was in a few moments.

To Garry however, sleep did not come so easily for he was thinking of the events of the evening, and wondering what he and his chums could do to checkmate the schemes of the unknown enemies that were causing all the trouble at the lumber camp. But Garry was a healthy growing boy, and not to be denied his sleep, so soon he consigned the cares

of the day to oblivion and in a few moments was fast asleep.

Howells was up before the boys, and started the coffee, and in a few moments his wife was downstairs and busying herself about the breakfast. They let the boys sleep until it was almost ready, then awoke them. The boys protested against all the trouble they were causing their hosts, but their protests were only half hearted for the smell of the boiling coffee and the frying bacon were so tempting that it would have taken a team of horses to drive them away without eating.

Breakfast over, they took their leave, first inquiring about the way that lay ahead. They found that they would go nearly twenty-five miles before coming to another town, as the way ran through the last of the farming country before striking the edge of the big timber country.

"The camp is ten miles or so beyond the village that you will come to, and it will take you at least a day to get to the village, so you will not reach the camp until nearly noon of tomorrow. There's a good chance that you will get a lift, however, for there is a circus there today, and you should find a great many people on the road. Don't be bashful about hailing them and asking for a lift. It is a customary thing to do in this part of the country.

I will see you in a couple of days, as I will go back on duty at the camp then," said Howells.

"Just one thing if you don't mind," interposed Garry. "When you come to the camp, do not let on that you are already acquainted with us, because if we are to work together we can do a lot better if there is no inkling of our acquaintance."

"That's a good idea, and that way it'll be," agreed Howells.

"What say, let's take this in a hurry and see how many miles we can cover this morning," suggested Dick.

The others stopped short in their tracks.

"Listen, Phil, unstrap your canteen while I feel his pulse. There's something the matter with Dick. He wants to hurry. If it was later in the day I would say that he had been a bit touched by the sun, but it is early and cool, and I think he is just sick," said Garry solicitously.

"Lazy Dick wants to hurry!" ejaculated Phil in amazement. "What's the big idea?"

Dick turned red and lunged at his chums. He was used to their ragging him on account of his willingness to take the easiest way of doing things. Of course they knew that he never shirked his duty when called upon, and they never questioned his bravery at any time, but he always got so fussed when they ragged him about his weight and his

easy way of taking life, that they never let an opportunity pass to tease him about it. After a short scuffle, they stopped laughing and Garry said:

"Seriously, Dick, why do you want to hurry? We are well up on our schedule and you don't need to rush like mad."

"I just wanted to see what we could do if we had to," said Dick; "and furthermore, I wanted to show you for once that I could walk as fast and as long as either of you chaps, that's all. Let's go."

Dick set off at a swinging pace, and kept it up. The boys fell in and kept pace with him, thinking that he would soon tire of it; but when they had covered three miles, and Dick had not abated a whit his speed, Garry and Phil saw that he was in earnest. Not to be outdone by him, they bent to their walking and made excellent time. They were passing a barn, when suddenly Garry stopped dead short, gave a shout and then fell to laughter with all his might. This time it was Dick's turn to assume a sarcastic attitude, and make side remarks to Phil. Finally when Garry had controlled his laughter so that he could speak, he said to Phil:

"What do you think of me for a regular little Sherlock Holmes? I've found out why Dick is trying to set a pedestrian record this morning. Just look at that barn!

Phil took one look at the glaring posters pasted on the wall, then gave a shout.

"Aha, the boy wants to go to the circus!"

"Marvelous," grunted Dick. "Own up, wouldn't you fellows like to see it yourself?"

The boys teased him for a few minutes, then they perceived that there was method in Dick's madness and they decided that it would be good fun to see the circus if they could get there on time.

"Only reason I wanted you chaps to hurry a little was because I figured that if we covered a good number of miles we would get to a point where people would be on the way to the circus and we could get a lift and arrive in time to see the show this afternoon. Then we could get another start right after it let out, and so fix it as to arrive at the camp fairly early in the morning, covering our last ten miles while it was early and cool," he explained.

"That's pretty good dope at that, Dick. Let's go. We'll see the circus and not waste any time doing it, either." And Garry set the pace as he finished talking.

They stopped at noon and prepared a hasty lunch by the side of the road, after Dick had stopped at a farm house and had his canteen filled with fresh milk.

By this time scores of automobiles and teams were on the road, but practically every one of them

was filled to overflowing with adults and children, all presumably bound for the circus. Finishing their meal, they rested fifteen minutes, then Garry, glancing at his watch, remarked: "We have still ten miles to go, and it is now half-past twelve. The circus probably begins at half-past two, so that unless we get a ride we won't get there in time to see the show. We couldn't cover the ten miles in two hours, especially after having come as far as we have this morning."

"I'm going to see that circus, though, even if we have to wait for the evening performance," announced Dick. "What do you fellows think?"

"I guess it would be all right," answered Garry. "There is no life or death matter to make us arrive early in the morning at the camp, so we might as well take it easy for the rest of the way." Luck was with them, however, for they had gone little more than a mile when they heard a car coming behind them. It proved to contain only a single occupant who, as he neared the boys, slowed down and asked if they did not want a ride. They were unanimous in their answer.

"On the way to the circus?" asked the driver.

"We're going beyond that, but we thought that we would stop and see it if we reached there on time, otherwise we would have seen the evening performance."

"Lucky thing that I came along and happen to be going to that place myself then," chuckled the driver, "for there isn't going to be any evening show. You see I happen to be connected with the circus, and we have such a long jump for tomorrow's show that we cannot give a performance here tonight."

"Good thing you came along then, for if we had walked all this distance for nothing, I would have given up in disgust," remarked Dick.

"How far have you come?" asked the circus man.

"We left Hilton this morning," answered Garry.

The driver looked somewhat incredulous at this statement, then sizing up the appearance of the boys, who were wearing their customary khaki semi-uniform that they used as Rangers in the forest, decided that they were hiking for the summer and probably used to walking good distances in a short time.

"What are you chaps doing, walking across the state or something?"

Garry explained that they were forest rangers off duty temporarily and were bound for a lumber camp to pay it a visit.

As they drove along they asked several questions about the circus and circus life, and considerably amused the man by referring to many things in a

way that circus people did not. The circus man told them of the many strange phrases employed by circus people, and the boys learned much of the talk of the circus.

They found, for instance, that circus people never speak of the tent. It is always called a top. There are the big top and the little tops. The only thing on the circus lot to be called a tent is the cook tent.

Several of the names applied to the performers were amusing. A clown is always called a joy, and if he is a new man with the circus he is called a First of May, because it is on that date that many contracts are made in the circus. Acrobats are called kinkers, and the people who do work on the high trapeze are called casters, and their work is called a casting act.

"Then there is the high diver, only we call it a tank diving act. You won't see that this afternoon, for the diver fell a couple of days ago and broke his arm. Funny; he's been diving forty feet into an eight foot tank for several years, and never got a scratch, and then he slips on a banana peeling and breaks his arm. It's too bad, too, for the diving act always goes big in these small towns. I'd give twenty-five dollars for a diver this afternoon," concluded the man.

"Hand over the twenty-five," said Dick suddenly.

"What do you mean," asked the circus man in surprise.

"Just that you give me the twenty-five dollars and I'll do your high dive for you this afternoon."

The circus man looked at the other two boys as if he doubted his ears, and Garry and Phil immediately assured them that Dick was a first class swimmer and diver.

"Forty feet is not so much to Dick. He's often done better than that in the river at home," Garry told the circus man.

"Yes, but you want to remember that this is an eight foot square tank, and only eight feet deep," he told Dick.

"That's nothing, I'll turn easily in eight feet. Have done it in a little less," Dick assured him.

"All right. I'll take you to see the owner when we get there, and he and you can fix things up. He'll be glad to pay you that amount for the work, for it's a big attraction and we have advertised it a lot. That's my business with the circus—to do the advertising."

In a little less than half an hour they had arrived at the circus lot, and true to his word, the advertising man carried Dick round to the ticket wagon and introduced him to the manager and owner.

It took Dick but a short time to convince the owner that he could dive, particularly when he

offered to give an exhibition for him before the show started. The only thing that the manager insisted on was that Dick sign a statement relieving the circus from any responsibility in case any accident occurred.

Dick readily signed this, and then promising to be back in a short time to get some tights and get dressed, they wandered around the lot. They left their rifles and knapsacks in the ticket wagon, but Garry kept his lariat with him.

"What's the idea?" asked Phil.

"There's very little chance of anything happening, but I don't want any of those riders to walk off with this lariat by mistake," he replied.

This decided the boys to keep theirs with them also, and accordingly they slung them over one shoulder. Several curious glances were cast at them as they wandered from show to show. The owner had given them passes to everything, and they didn't waste any of them.

Soon a bugle was heard blowing and in a moment they met the advertising man who informed them that called all the performers to be ready in a few moments. "Your act will be the fourth on the program, so you'd better go and get your togs on and be ready," he told Dick.

Garry and Phil elected to go to their seats and

watch their chum do his act with the rest of the spectators.

"I'll come and hunt you up as soon as I do the dive and collect that twenty-five good old dollars. I can use it very nicely one of these days," Dick said as he turned to follow the circus man to the dressing place.

While the circus was a small one, it boasted of rather better things than the average road circus, and among other things was a fairly good menagerie. Garry and Phil looked at all the animals as they passed through to the "big top."

Two cages contained unusually fine specimens of lions, and near one was a caretaker, waiting for the lions to be taken into the big performing cage, after which he would clean the cage and have it ready on the shaggy maned animal's return from the ring.

"Wicked looking beast, isn't he," Garry remarked to the man who stood near the cage.

"He is that, boss," answered the man. "He's a a new one, and we don't know him very well. We had a nice old chap before him, too old and tired and toothless to do any harm, but this one is young and vicious. The trainer has a lot of trouble with him, too."

A sound of band music made the boys hurry to their seats, and soon the "Grand entry" was on.

Several of the usual acts were put on, and then

razorbacks, as the circus workers are called, pulled away some of the planking of the platform in the center of the arena, disclosing a tank filled with water.

Soon the boys espied Dick advancing to the platform, his chubby body enclosed in a glaring red bathing suit. He mounted to the tank, and the chums could see him gazing about trying to locate them, but this he failed to do.

The ringmaster made a short speech, telling a lot of stuff about Dick that made the chums grin.

"Guess one has to be a blood relation of Ananias to be a ringmaster," laughed Garry. "The only diving Dick has ever done before the crowned heads of Europe was before they were crowned."

After the laudatory speech, Dick climbed up the high ladder and stood perched on the little square platform at the top. As he had been told to do outside the big top, he dropped a handkerchief which slowly fluttered down to the ground below. This is an old trick of high divers and is done merely to accentuate the distance.

Then the drummer started a long ruffle, and casting one downward look, Dick tipped off the platform. Both Phil and Garry were just a trifle nervous as he leaped, although they were well aware of his ability.

But Dick hit the water as clean as a knife, and it

was only a matter of seconds before he appeared on the surface of the water and climbed out dripping. A mighty round of applause was given not only for the fact that he had made a fine dive, but his youth made him popular with the audience.

The acts went on, and in a little while Dick came wandering into the tent. The boys hailed him as he neared the place where they were sitting, and in a trice he had climbed up the rattling board seats to a place beside his chums.

"Well, I got my twenty-five, and we'll have a party with it some time. Also, I received an offer to stay with the circus, which, naturally, I turned down. So you see, Phil, you are not the only one to have jobs offered them." He alluded to the time that a big league baseball scout had offered a contract to Phil after seeing him pitch one game at Commencement time at high school in his home town. The music stopped and the ringmaster made his customary speech about the next act, which was the lion taming act.

The music had just started again, when there was a piercing shriek from a woman, and then some one screamed:

"The lion is loose!"

CHAPTER V

EXTRA ENEMIES

HUNDREDS of people joined in the shrieking, and a stampede from the seats started. Scores were trampled. The music had stopped for an instant until the leader, true to tradition, called the men to order, and the musicians swung into a stirring march. Circus hands, aided by the performers who were on the platforms and in the rings, ran to the sides of the tracks and endeavored to keep the people in their seats.

The three chums were aghast for a minute, then Phil and Dick instinctively turned to Garry to see what he would do. Garry had taken one look and saw the beast at the far end of the tent, lashing his tail and surveying the crowd, as though making up its mind as to what course to pursue.

The boys saw that Garry was hastily slipping his lasso from his shoulder, and in a moment they had understood what he was going to attempt, and followed suit.

"Now fellows, let's try it. We may save a lot of lives. I'll try for his head, and you two try for a foot each. I think we can catch him all right. Let's go!" and Garry led the way.

Calling to everyone to sit still as they ran, and swinging their lariats over their heads, they struggled to the ground. Several people seeing them make their way there, thought that it was perhaps a part of the circus, and began to shout to each other that it was a feature of the program. The sight of the three boys making their way fearlessly toward the beast did more than anything else to quiet the people. Many sat back in their seats, although others were escaping under the canvas wall of the tent.

It was to Phil, however, that the greatest honor was to come. As he ran, swinging one arm, his hand hit against a pocket in his coat, and he felt a hard lump within. In an instant he remembered that he bought pepper the day before to replenish the condiment can that he generally carried in his knapsack, but had not thought to take it out and transfer the contents from the package to the can. He reached into his pocket and brought out the can. Hastily opening the top, he kept on his way toward the lion, holding the package out in front of him. The chums approached within a few feet of the lion, who was showing signs of springing suddenly

at them. The effect of the boys' advance on him was to make him forget the crowds and center all his attention on those that were nearest him—the chums.

The boys stopped short and were swinging their lariats, when suddenly Phil darted ahead almost up to the lion, and, with a well directed aim, emptied the contents of the pepper package straight on the eyes of the lion.

The infuriated beast gave a roar of pain and sprang, then fell to earth and stuck a great paw into his eyes, as though to rub away the torturing stuff that was blinding him.

Garry, quickwitted, divined what Phil had done, and at the same moment that the lion struck the ground, ran forward and threw the noose of the lariat over the animal's head.

The animal was nearly helpless, owing to its inability to see, and in another moment the boys had the rest of their lariats noosed about his feet.

By this time the trainer and a number of the circus helpers had arrived on the scene, and, dashing in, they tied the lariats securely about the animal's feet.

The crowd seeing that the animal was securely fastened and helpless, first breathed a sigh of relief and then became suddenly quiet. Many still thought it was a part of the program, but a majority felt

sure that it was a striking piece of bravery that they had just witnessed.

Then cheer on cheer rolled through the tent, as the audience applauded the brave trio of chums. All the foregoing had taken much less time than the minutes necessary to describe it. In a moment the owner came puffing on the scene, and when he saw who had accomplished the capture, he was speechless for the moment.

Then he said to the chums, as they stood watching the animal being loaded into its cage:

"This is twice today that you boys have done me a good turn, but this second time far outmatches the first. Will you please come back to the ticket wagon with me." Then to the menagerie head, who had joined them: "I'd like you to come, too, please, Jones."

The little group made its way to the ticket office, where the owner first asked for an account of how the beast had made its escape.

"The only man who can tell you that is the roustabout who cleans the animal's cage. He was gashed by the lion evidently as its escape was being made, and that and very likely a heart stroke killed him quickly. I think perhaps he thought it was near time for the transfer to the arena cage to be made and had unlocked the cage door, and the lion pushed its way out, sir," said Jones.

The manager was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"No one can know how sorry I am that the man lost his life, but I am thankful that the lion did no other damage, either by starting a great panic or by attacking some one of the audience. As for you boys, I propose to make you a substantial reward."

"I assure you, sir," began Garry, "we have no thought of any reward for doing what we did. It was luck on our part that enabled us to lasso him, and we get our satisfaction in knowing that we perhaps saved a great many lives."

"I hope you will accept something as a recompense for your services. Had the lion done great damage, I would have had to pay out many thousands of dollars," insisted the owner.

"Let us ask you one question first. Was the workman that was killed a family man?" asked Garry.

"I can tell you that in a minute." Turning to the ticket seller, he told him to look the man up. A record of all the workers with their home addresses was kept in a card index and in a moment the ticket seller had ascertained that the dead man had a wife living in a small town in New York State.

"Of course we will take care of the widow, as we have every worker insured, and then the man-

agement always adds to the insurance," said the head of the circus.

"Then I wish that you would just take whatever you had thought of offering us in the way of a reward and add to the amount. I think my chums agree with me that this is the best thing that could be done. Is that right?" and Garry turned to his friends. Both Dick and Phil were emphatic in their agreement.

"Well, if that is the way you boys feel about it, I will do so, but I will find some way to show you that I appreciate the great service that you have done me."

The owner asked them several other questions and took their names and addresses, and again he offered to take the boys along with them on the tour. Of course they refused, explaining that they were of the Ranger Service of the State and were only on detached duty at the time.

They remained for supper at the cook tent, and watched the circus torn down and loaded in the teams preparatory to travelling to the next stop.

After a hearty goodbye from the manager and owner they took their leave, and hiking beyond the town spread their blankets for the night.

They woke with the rising of the sun, and building a fire soon had coffee, spider bread and bacon going, and made a hearty breakfast.

"According to my reckoning we are about ten miles from the camp, and the woods will begin in about a mile or two, so we had better get going. It is now six o'clock and with three hours of easy hiking we will make our destination," said Garry. "Now I think we ought to hold a council of war as to how we shall conduct ourselves when we get to the camp. I think it best that we just go to the manager and tell him we are going to camp there for awhile, either right at the lumber camp, or a short distance in the woods. Of course we shall give no inkling of the nature of our visit, not even to the manager, at least until we have sized him up. To my mind, everyone will be under suspicion until he has proven that the suspicion is unfounded. We can go all over the camp and keep our eyes open, getting all the information we can. When we ask questions we should ask them simply as though it were from idle curiosity. I figure that in a short time we ought to be able to tell who is acting suspiciously and then bend all our efforts to watch them and frustrate any mischief that they may be up to. We shall, of course, get a lot of help from Howells when he arrives, but even then I think we ought to do everything possible ourselves to find out what is the trouble at the camp."

They walked steadily but easily, and true to their reckoning arrived at the camp a little after nine

o'clock. The boys looked about them curiously. There were only three buildings, built of logs. One, the smallest, was evidently the officers' bunkhouse and offices; the other was apparently the cookhouse, for the boys could see a youth sitting on an upturned tub in front of the door peeling potatoes, and a thin wisp of smoke issued from the chimney. Since it was mid-summer and hot, there would be no need for a stove in any place but the kitchen. The third house was a long, low log affair, bigger by far than either of the others. This they decided was the bunk house, where the lumberjacks lived.

They made their way to the office and inquired for the manager. On hearing the word "manager," a thin, sharpfaced man approached them, and giving them a hasty glance, said in a sharp tone:

"If you're here to ask for permission to camp on this tract you're out of luck. This is a lumber operation and not a free camp site for every fool from the city."

"Just a minute, please. Hadn't you better find out our business before you make up your mind as to what you will or won't do?" asked Garry, as an angry red flush overspread his face. Garry was an extremely civil boy, and expected others to be the same, and when he received uncourteous attention was apt to resent it deeply.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the manager, still in an ungracious tone.

"My name is Boone, and the owner of these cuttings happens to be my father. Didn't you get a letter from him telling of our expected arrival?"

A great change came over the manner of the manager. A smirking smile took the place of the frown and he advanced with outstretched hand.

"I hope you will pardon me. I have been bothered to death for the past few days by summer campers asking to pitch tents and build cabins and what not on the cutting, and I thought from your appearance that you boys were more of the same tribe," he said with an attempt to smooth out the awkward situation and make up by a show of cordiality the blunder he realized he had made.

Privately, Garry thought him very ill-mannered and felt he should have made more inquiries before showing his temper. Still he said nothing and accepted the hand of the manager, who said his name was Barrows.

Garry then introduced his chums and explained that they intended to stay awhile and camp somewhere in the vicinity and watch the lumbering as well as getting some fishing.

"I understand that there are two lakes in the neighborhood," remarked Garry, "and so we ought to get some good fishing." At the mention of the

word lakes, Barrows looked sharply at the boys, then said:

"Oh, yes, you will get plenty of fishing, but you will find that the small lake to the west of here is better than the big one that lies to the north of us. The state stocked the little lake sometime ago by special request of your father, and I hear there are some very good bass and pickerel to be found there. The reports about the larger lake are not so encouraging. Also there are two or three small streams, —brooks perhaps it would be beter to call them,— where you will find some excellent trout. Then at the small lake there is a good stretch of sandy beach where you can swim whenever you want to. Altogether you will find the small lake is the most likely place for a summer playground."

For a moment Garry wondered at the insistence of the manager in always bringing the "small" lake into the conversation, but dismissed the matter with the thought that the manager was simply trying to make amends for his ungraciousness of the previous moment by showing them where they could best enjoy themselves. Later he was to find that he was mistaken.

The manager asked them what they intended to do for living quarters. "I am sorry that I can't offer you quarters in the bunkhouse here, but they are just built to accommodate the officers of the

camp; that is myself, the scaler, the timekeeper and the bookkeeper. Of course you would not want to live in the bunkhouse with the men, for they are a rough lot. All I can suggest is that we makeshift for you some way and I will send to town and dig up a tent for you."

"If you will just loan us an axe apiece, and tell us which spot we can cut a little timber from, we can throw ourselves up a cabin in a short time, so don't bother about a tent. If necessary we can sleep in the open till we get our shack fixed up," answered Garry.

"Why, I can do better than that. I can let you have a couple or three men to help you and do the work if you can direct them as to the kind of cabin you want.

"I don't want to take any of the men away from their work," Garry told him, "but if we could have two or three for a few minutes to help us throw up the cabin after we cut the stuff it would help greatly."

"I will go and mark out some of the trees that you can cut. There is a small growth here that isn't exceptionally good lumber, its rather scrubby, but will do very well for a cabin. I'll have to go myself, for I left the cruiser go a few days to do some business he had waiting him, and I have been scaling myself. In fact I do that often. Whenever

he is cruising to mark trees for cutting I do the measuring and that saves a lot of time, also it saves the pay of an extra man. You ought to have a good bit done by noontime and then after dinner I will detail a couple of men to help you," and the manager led the way to the cookhouse, where there were several extra axes.

When they arrived at the cookhouse, they looked about with quite a bit of curiosity. Two great ranges stood at one end of the kitchen, and on one of the ranges were two enormous kettles. The boys could smell appetizing pea soup and judged that one of the kettles contained this.

The cook was an enormous man with a pair of fierce black moustaches, and the one man on the whole range who was regarded as being just a little bit better than the boss or even the owner of the timber tract. Lumberjacks always took care never to pick a quarrel with him, and this went the same for the manager and the camp officers.

This is the same in every logging camp, for a cook can pay up any grievances by cooking the food in an inferior fashion. Camp owners and managers always pay the greatest attention to the sort of man they pick for this position, for while in a lumber camp, there is never a widely varied menu, it must be well cooked and plentiful.

Nothing will drive the men away from a camp quicker than poor cooking.

The manager introduced the boys to the cook, who shook hands with them, offering a hairy hand which the chums privately thought resembled a ham. For all his fierce looks he proved to be a genial chap, and the three boys wondered whether he was one of the ring of trouble makers or not. They reserved any decision in their own minds to await future developments, but they had decided that everyone was under suspicion until he proved that he was clear of any blame in the mysterious occurrences that retarded progress at the lumber camp.

In every camp there is a cookee, as the helper to the cook is universally called. His duty is to peel potatoes, wash dishes, wait on the table—rather set the tables than wait, for everything is piled on at the beginning of the meal, and the only helping that is done is when a dish has to be re-filled.

The cookee was a surly looking chap of about twenty-one years of age. He was slight of build and had violent red hair. He just mumbled a word or two when he was introduced, and went on with his work, which was slicing bread for the dinner hour that was near at hand. Garry and his friends mentally put him down as one that might bear watching as soon as they had located themselves.

While the manager was asking the cook about borrowing a couple of the axes that were stacked in the corner, a black-browed chap came to the door and asked for a pail of water to take out to where several of the men were trimming trees. The cookee brought the water and stepped outside with the man. Garry and Phil were talking with the manager and the cook, but Phil happened to be standing near the door.

He heard the sound of talking in the French language and strained his ears to catch what was being said. Phil was not eavesdropping because of a natural desire to do so; it was merely that he was on the watch every moment for a possible clue that would lead them to the solution that they were in quest of,—the riddle of the mishaps at the lumber camp.

What Phil heard was this:

"Baptiste will be at the usual place at midnight tonight."

Phil determined then and there that he would be at the rendezvous, wherever it was, and hear what transpired. He could hardly wait to get the others with him so that he could impart to them the information that he had just overheard.

He hoped that something else would be said, but at this moment the cook called for his helper, who

came hustling back into the shanty, and went about preparing for the serving of the dinner.

Phil went back to join his chums just in time to hear the manager say:

"Unless you boys want the fun of throwing up a log house, I would suggest a much easier and quicker way. You can cut enough poles for the supports of the house, and then I'll have some sawed boards brought to the spot. Also there is some tarred paper here that was brought here when the camp started just for such an emergency. That would mean that you could be all located before nightfall. As for heat, I have a Sibley stove, one of those small ones such as they use in army camps for tents, that will do very well. It isn't likely that you will want it often, for we are in the hottest part of the summer, and only on a cold, wet night will you require heat. You won't be here such a long time, I presume, and we are in for a spell of good weather according to the cook here, who is the camp weather prophet."

Garry thought for a moment, and wondered what made the manager presume they would be there only a short time. He was anxious to get going about the camp as soon as possible and see what there was to pick up in the way of information, so he decided that the board house would do as well as one built entirely of logs.

"That is a fine suggestion and we will accept. Building a hut is nothing new to us, and we are anxious to begin fishing and wandering about, so if you will show us where we can cut enough good heavy saplings for supports, we will start right at it. We can have them cut and in place before dinner and then the men can bring us the boards after dinner and we will be all shipshape by nightfall," said Garry.

"I think that is the best thing to do," the manager answered. "It is about an hour to dinner time, and you will have ample time to do all that can be done this forenoon."

So saying, Barrows led the way to a spot near the camp, where there was a clump of saplings that were not big enough to be used for sawed lumber.

"You might as well pitch your shanty here as anywhere, and it will save you from dragging your saplings to any great distance. I'll gash each of the saplings that you will need. You will only want ten as I figure it."

"No, we will want twelve so that we may have a window," interposed Garry.

"That's a fact," answered the manager, looking sharply at Garry. "I see that you know rather a bit about shanty building. Do you know much about logging operations? I suppose you do, however,

since you are of a family that has always made logging a business."

Garry felt that the manager was asking this question for a purpose, but he promptly answered:

"No, we know very little about logging, surprising as that may seem, since as you say it ought to run in the blood. About the only thing we understand about timbering operations is the log drive in the spring. We were up once to watch the fight for the river, and had a mighty exciting time, but the entire business is something new to all of us."

Garry finished speaking and then looked sharply but guardedly at Barrows. He thought he noticed a relieved expression on the face of the manager.

The three boys set about felling the saplings, swinging their axes with a sure arm and hand. Barrows lingered to watch them at work, although Phil was on tenterhooks to have him get away in order that he might impart to his chums the information that he had gained from the sentence he had overheard at the cook shanty.

The poles being cut, four of them were erected in an upright manner to form the main support of the house. At the tops of these, four more were placed horizontally to support the roof. Then in the center of the front, two were erected to form the sides of the door, while at a side two others, in vertical position, allowed the making of a window.

Still the manager made no show of leaving until fortunately for Phil, who would have almost exploded had be been forced to keep silent any longer, he was called by the red headed cookee.

"Now quick fellows, while I have a chance to tell you. I have found one of the traitors in the camp; it is the cookee. He is going to meet some one tonight to hatch something out, and you chaps have one guess as to who it is."

"Barrows?" hazarded Dick.

"Wrong. Baptiste LeBlanc!"

CHAPTER VI

THE LUMBER CAMP

"THE LeBlancs again!" exploded Garry. "I thought that we had seen the last of that outfit. It seems that we are destined to run afoul of them. Fortunately this Baptiste does not know about us, unless he has run across his brother lately. That does not seem likely, for Jean is safely beyond the border still. There are few places where he is safe, for he is wanted in several different parts of the state. Still we must not take anything for granted. We probably were seen by Baptiste when we were instrumental in saving Howells from a bad beating or worse the other night."

"How are we going to find out where the rendezvous is tonight?" asked Dick.

"It seems to me that the best thing to do is to keep watch of the red headed cookee; that is, you two chaps do that, while I will watch for the man that told him of the appointment. You boys haven't seen him, so you cannot keep on his trail.

You can take turns keeping in the vicinity of the cookee. If possible you might try and make acquaintance with him, although I doubt if you will go very far, since he seems to be a surly sort of a chap. Still, there's no harm in trying. When it comes time for the meeting, I should say that it would be best only for me to follow them. I can understand what they are saying, and one of us could follow unobserved, where three would be spotted in a minute. You chaps can plead to being tired after your hike and the work of building the shack, and that will give us a chance to get to the new shanty early, and so be unobserved."

At that moment they heard the sound of a tin pan being vigorously beaten with a stick, and immediately Dick set up a shout:

"There's the dinner signal, or my ears and stomach fail me."

"For once I am ready to eat a good big meal. You are not the only one with an appetite today, Dick," said Garry, and the three raced for the cookhouse.

As they neared the cook tent, they saw the lumberjacks piling towards the place to eat. They were a sizable group of men, brawny of arm and large of frame.

Most of them gave the boys a curious glance as they flocked into the shanty. The boys thought

that they were to eat in the common dining room, but found that they were to eat in a separate room that had been partitioned off from the large room. Here ate the manager, the timekeeper and cashier, and when he was present, the timber scaler.

The food that was served them was the same as that given the men. Barrows explained this by saying that it kept the men in a better humor if they knew that the bosses were getting the same fare as they.

"Lumberjacks are just like so many children," Barrows said. "They are always on the lookout for something to quarrel about, and are almost as temperamental as grand opera stars. Just now work is scarce, so they keep better behaved; but in the winter time, when all the camps are going full blast, you have to be careful and treat them properly, else they will simply depart for some city where there is a woods agency and be sent off to another camp. That is one of the evils of lumbering, the agencies. They often try to breed trouble in the camps so that the men will quit. Then they pack them off to another logging tract and collect a commission from the camp owner for furnishing him with men. If this was winter I would think that was what was the trouble here."

Garry looked up in surprise. He had no idea

that Barrows would admit that everything was not as it should be at the camp.

He knew that the eyes of the manager were on him, nevertheless he felt that an answer was expected of him, or rather a question.

"Why, is there anything the trouble at this camp? From what I've seen I should say that everyone was working busily and everything was lovely."

At this the manager brightened up considerably. It seemed to be that this was the kind of a remark that he was looking for, and he made haste to answer:

"Oh, there is nothing radically wrong here, I only meant that occasionally there seemed to be a sort of dissatisfied air on the part of the men, but it may only be worry on my part."

Garry was certain that the entire conversation was brought about in a manner to delve into the feelings of the boys, and see how they regarded everything. Garry did not believe that their mission was penetrated, but thought that the guilty conscience of the manager would make him see an enemy in every person he did not know.

The dinner was plain but good. It consisted of pea soup, potatoes, some roasted beef, and coffee. The fare at a lumber camp is anything but varied. The aforementioned articles, roast pork, stew and beans, with either white bread baked at the camp,

or great slabs of johnny cake with molasses in lieu of syrup was the general thing. Coffee was served at every meal.

"For breakfast we have bacon and toast and coffee in our dining room, because the men have all eaten and started for work by the time we are ready for breakfast," said Barrows. "Now we will go into the other room, and I will give you boys a general introduction to the men. That will save you any annoyance when you go about the camp."

He led the way into the larger room, and stepping on a bench announced:

"Men, these three boys are going to camp here for awhile. This one," pointing to Garry, "is the son of the owner. The other two are his friends. I wanted you to meet them so that you may do all you can to make their visit here a good one."

Garry thought to himself, "Yes, you are also showing us to those in your crew so they will watch their step while we are around." A good many of the men just sized the boys up, a few hollered good-natured remarks at them, while several pressed forward and shook the hands of the boys, remarking they had worked many years for Mr. Boone and were glad to meet his son and his friends.

The three chums took especial care to fix these men in their minds, for the same thought came to them all,—that if trouble arose, it was likely that

these men would prove loyal friends in need. Barrows detailed some of the men to bring back the necessary lumber for the shanty, and then the men went back to their work for the afternoon.

Soon they heard a chugging sound and presently a tractor hove into sight, dragging a broad-wheeled cart on which was the lumber. The manager came up, leading a couple of men with some heavy rolls of tarred paper, and all was ready to build the shanty.

Sandy, the big Airedale, was gravely watching the boys when the men with the tar paper arrived, and one ot them seeing the dog, remarked:

"How would you chaps like to go coon hunting tonight, that is if your pup will trail a coon?"

This was just what the boys did not want to do that night, so Garry hastily made the excuse that they were tired from their march and the work of throwing up the shanty, but said they would be glad to go the following night.

This seemed all right to the men, who proceeded to make friends with Sandy, that is as much as that sedate dog would let them, for an Airedale makes few friends outside of his own family circle.

The work of putting up the shanty was done in a short time since there were so many workers, and the addition of two bunks made it complete.

Barrows volunteered the information that there

was a spare table in the office, and a bench and a couple of chairs that could be taken from the dining room.

"Then all we have to do is to cut some balsam boughs for our bunks and we will be as snug as bugs in a rug," announced Phil.

Phil and Dick were dispatched to get the boughs, while Garry talked of inconsequential matters with Barrows until their return.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in wandering about the cutting. It was a revelation to the boys, the sight of the great timber falling in the exact direction that it was wanted. The boys noted that the cut was made just as Howells had told them, and they wondered whether or not any spikes would be encountered.

The felling of a tree is an interesting process. The swing begins on the side where the cutters do not want the tree to fall. Then when the saw is better than two-thirds of the way through the trees, the swampers or axemen take their stand at either side of the tree, and make a cut a trifle under the line where the saw is coming through. This is done to cause the tree to fall on that side. The axemen work like clockwork, using a double bitted axe,— that is one that has two blades,—and make the chips positively fly, one drawing his axe away just in time to let the other man make a blow. Just

as the moment comes for the tree to fall, the cry of "tim-ber-r-r-r" is raised by one of the axemen and this is the signal for all to be out of the way as the great tree falls with a crash that shakes the ground for many feet around.

Following the falling of the timber, the trimmers begin their work. Starting at the base end of the tree, one on each side, they walk up the sides of the fallen monarch of the forest, and trim the branches off as far as they are able. Many of the branches on the under side of the tree are broken in the fall, others are only splintered and many of them are just bent. A dozen men then seize their peavy sticks, as they are called in Maine, or cant dogs in some other places where lumbering is done, and roll the tree over. A peavy stick is a heavy pole about six feet long, with a sharp iron point at the end. About a foot from this point is attached a loose curved iron arm very much like one side of an ice-man's tongs. This swings back and forth from the handle. The men prod the iron point into the trunk of the tree, and then catch the swinging end of the hook into the trunk. This gives them almost a handle to the tree, and the long pole furnishes them the necessary leverage. At a word from the man on the end, all give a mighty heave, and the tree is rolled over, when the remaining branches are lopped off.

The lumberjacks are experts in the use of the peavy stick, and it is a pretty sight to see them load a great trunk onto a flat car to be drawn away. The method is almost the same as that used in turning over a trunk,—only just half of the men fix their sticks. They give it half a turn and then hold it in position on the skids, while the other half get a grip and start turning. In this way, turn and turn about, they roll the log right up the skids and onto the car.

In this instance the trunks were not hauled to the mill on a car; a chain was attached instead, and then one of the baby tractors was used to drag it over the ground to the mill. There were a half a dozen of these tractors at the camp. Three were constantly employed in dragging the cut timber to the mill, while the other three were used to draw the flat cars to the railroad tracks, a half a dozen miles from the camp.

After watching the felling of several trees, the boys essayed trimming, and while they were by no means unskillful at it, caused many a laugh among the men because of the time they took. Whereas they often took two or three strokes to take off a branch, the skilled woodsmen with one swift, clean cut, lopped off a good thick branch.

The boys took their chaffing good naturedly and

thereby won a lot of regard from the jacks, many of whom were ready to sneer at "city chaps."

From the timbering they went to the sawmill. Here they found a busy whir of activity. Logs were rolled onto the carriage and sent down the plane, while the great circular saw bit its way through the length of the tree like a hot knife through a pat of butter.

The carriage then runs back to where it started, while a mechanical device shoves the log sideways as many inches as is desired and the carriage starts on its journey again. This is done until the log has been "sliced into planks." These are then piled on one side, waiting for the flat cars to be loaded and hauled away by the tractor.

This operation that has been described entails more labor than the winter logging, for then the trees are simply cut and rolled to one side of the river. This continues throughout the winter until the cutting has been complete and then they wait for the ice to go out. As soon as the ice breaks up, the logs are tumbled into the river and floated down the stream. For days they float down the river to the mills below, which are always located on the river banks, and here they are ground up and made into pulp from which paper is later manufactured.

The logs are distinguished one from another when they reach their journey's end by branding,

much as the horses that roam the feeding places in the West are known by their brand. Every lumberman has his mark, and a gash is made at one end of the log, and on this is made the mark.

For example, Garry's father had his mark AB, which stood for his initials. In this instance it was not necessary to brand the lumber, for it all came from the same cutting and was transported directly to the same destination.

After supper that night, the men gathered outside heir bunkhouses, playing cards or simply leaning back against the wall and smoking. One of the French Canadian lumberjacks produced a mouth organ, and another a battered guitar, and those who spoke the French joined in an old "chanson" or song.

Soon one of the Americans, seizing on a lull in the conversation and singing, struck up an old-time lumberjack song, and in a moment the whole camp had joined in. The lumberjack songs are mostly about camp events, the fight for the river at the spring flood, some great battle that took place between two rival lumber camps, for your true lumberjack is as ready to fight as to eat.

Where these songs come from, no one knows. They are as old as the lumbering industry in Maine, and generally are written with a chorus at the end. One man sings the verse and then the camp joins in

the chorus in a thundering tone. There is generally more noise than melody, at least in the choruses, for a man that has a fair voice always sings the verse part. Some of these songs are of a seemingly endless duration, but the lumberjacks never tire of singing them.

As the men sang the moon came up, and made a scene that was long to be remembered by the boys. In spite of their enjoying the evening, they kept a sharp eye on the movements of the red haired cookee, although he made no move to disappear. The boys figured that he probably would not until the camp was asleep. Soon the men began to yawn, and turn into the bunkhouse, while the boys bade goodnight to the manager and repaired to their own shack. They turned in, and as soon as all seemed quiet, Phil started out, and walking in the shadows, made for the spot he had picked that afternoon as being a safe place to watch the exit from the bunkhouse.

Garry and Dick dropped off to sleep, and were only awakened some time later by hearing Phil climb into his bunk. In a moment they were wide awake.

"What news," whispered Garry.

"Go on to sleep," advised Phil in a disappointed tone. "The LeBlanc never showed up, and I've lost three hours' sleep for nothing. Goodnight!"

CHAPTER VII

A NOCTURNAL VISITOR

It was in that dark hour that precedes the dawn, which for some reason or other is always the blackest of the night. The three boys were sleeping soundly. Suddenly Phil awoke and sniffed the air. For a moment or two he was dazed, then he gave a shout.

His cry of alarm woke the others, and they were about to leap from their beds when Phil's warning shout prevented them.

"What's the trouble, Phil?" asked Garry. "Are there snakes in the shack or are you just having a nightmare? Whew!" Garry had no need to ask any further questions.

The nocturnal visitor was nothing more nor less than a polecat, that little animal of the woods about the size of a cat, but commonly called a skunk.

Phil retained his presence of mind, and reached to the bottom of his bunk and hauled out one of his heavy shoepacks. With a well directed aim he

heaved it at the unwelcome little intruder, which at that moment was near the door. The force of the blow carried the animal out into the night, and then the boys hopped out of their bunks and seized their clothes. Keeping a wary eye, they dashed through the door and out of the way. The animal by this time was scampering away.

Going back to the shack was almost out of the question, for he had left his unmistakable scent behind him.

"There goes my night's sleep all shot to pieces," exclaimed Phil in an aggravated tone. First I go on a wild goose chase to hear a plot and hear nothing, then this comes up, and blooie, there is goodbye to rest. Bet you I take a nap this morning. Wonder if that smell will evaporate or will we have to build a new shack. Also there is going to be a door on the next one. I don't want any more night visitors like that chap."

"Hush a minute," whispered Garry. To the ears of the boys, trained by their work in the woods to catch the slightest sound, came the soft noise as of someone walking towards the bunkhouse. In a moment Garry was flat on the ground, wiggling along as does an Indian on the war path in a manner that the boys had often practiced when they were Scouts.

He was back in about five minutes. The others

were all curious to know what had made him act in such a mysterious manner.

"Someone was prowling about, and just a moment ago went into the bunkhouse. I could hear him when he dropped his shoes as he got ready to crawl into the bunk. Here's what I think. That wood pussy may have wandered into the shack all by his lonesome, but for my part I think it is the first event in a campaign to make things so unpleasant for us that we will cut short our visit and go away," whispered Garry.

"They couldn't have picked on anything much better to make it unpleasant," answered Dick. "What will we do now?"

By this time the first faint streaks of dawn appeared, and in a little while the camp would be astir.

"It is almost morning, and now that we are wide awake and up, we might as well stay so," answered Garry. "First thing we do this morning is to get a few more boards and fashion a door for this shack. Also I saw some heavy screening yesterday,—you notice that all the windows are screened, —and we will tack a double thickness of that over the window. That will afford us some slight protection against the invasion of more friends such as the one that paid us an unwelcome call."

In a little while the camp was starting to come to

life. First appeared the cookee who favored the boys with a knowing grin, then came the cook, who immediately started the work of getting breakfast. Finally, struggling into their clothes as they came yawning through the doors, appeared the lumberjacks.

Garry cautioned his chums to say nothing for the moment about their experience of the night. They passed several moments in chatting with those of the lumberjacks with whom they thought they might make friends that would perhaps stand them in good stead later on. Garry was telling a funny story and at its conclusion the men burst into a roar of laughter.

The red headed cookee happened to be passing just as the men began to laugh, and he looked sharply at the boys. While he was serving them breakfast in the smaller room,—they happened to be alone as Barrows had not yet arisen,—he remarked:

"Understand you chaps didn't sleep very well last night."

"No, we didn't," answered Garry, looking up quickly.

"Well, better luck next time," and still grinning the cookee shambled out of the room.

"Well!" exploded Garry. "If that chap didn't go and give himself clean away first shot out of the gun!"

"Looks as though your hunch about its being a part of the campaign of ruthlessness was a fact," said Dick with a laugh.

"Only question in my mind," said Phil, "is did he think of it himself as a sort of a practical joke, or was he put up to it by Barrows?"

"Looks pretty certain to me that Barrows was the instigator of the matter," answered Garry.

When Barrows appeared, the boys explained the matter to him, and asked him for the necessary lumber with which to construct a door, also some screening for the window. Barrows told them they could go to the saw mill and select whatever they wanted in the way of boards.

As they were getting the boards, an old grizzled lumberman chatted with them. He asked why they wanted a door in that kind of weather, and Garry told him the story.

"They do leave a reg'lar trail behind them, don't they?" laughed the old man. "I'll tell you what you can do, though, and it will fix things up pretty well. I always keep some sulphur on hand when I'm in the woods. Occasionally you get a rash from the browntail moths in the woods, and the best thing for a cure is a poultice made with a little sulphur. When you put your door on, take a few extra boards and board up your window. Then take the sulphur that I give you and put it in a pan

and set it on fire with a hot coal from the kitchen range. Then you hop out and let the shack get thoroughly filled with the fumes o' the sulphur, and you'll find after a couple or three hours that you'll have your place fumigated as pretty as if you had ten boards of health do the job for you."

The boys thanked the old timer, and left with their lumber. A few minutes later he appeared on the scene with his sulphur, and the work of boarding the window and making a door being completed, they did as he had directed and went on a tour of the camp.

As they were wandering about, with Sandy at their heels, they were again approached by the man who had wanted to go on a coon hunt. This time they accepted his invitation, and arranged to go that night.

The day passed quickly, for there were many things about the camp to attract their atention, and they asked numerous questions of such of the lumberjacks as seemed inclined to spend a moment or two to answer them.

As soon as it got dark, the coon hunter appeared and asked if they were ready to go. He was accompanied by one or two of his friends, and Garry noticed that one of them carried a burlap bag.

The boys secured their rifles, and were about to

join the party, when one of the men, noticing the guns, said:

"You don't need your rifles, although you can carry 'em if you want. We were aiming to catch the coon alive and see if we couldn't tame him for a sort of pet around the camp. That's what we brought the bag for."

"Good," answered Garry. "We aren't much on shooting animals just for the sake of shooting."

The trio of men led the way to where the man called Tom had said he had seen a raccoon a few days before. Sandy was eagerly sniffing at the ground, and soon he gave vent to a low growl.

"By gosh, I believe he's got the scent already," chuckled one of the men. "It may be some other kind of an animal, but I doubt it. All I've seen around here is the raccoon, although there were a few rabbits at different times. Still the raccoon is the most likely to be out prowling at this time of night."

Soon Sandy was off, with his nose close to the ground. After a few moments he had left them entirely, and they followed only by means of his occasional barks. After almost half a mile of chasing, they heard a series of wild barks, and knew that Sandy had driven something to bay.

In a few moments they had caught up to the dog, and there sure enough he had something treed

and was venting his pleasure by loud and vociferous barks.

They peered up into the tree and could see nothing. In the meantime one of the men had discovered a hole at the foot of the tree.

"Now one of you fellows get some branches, dry ones of course, and we'll soon have Mr. Coon all trapped as nice as you please."

One of the men, assisted by Dick, soon gathered an armful of dry sticks. Getting a boost from his friend, Tom soon shinnied up the tree, and stopped after he had gotten about fifteen feet up well into the branches, for it was a small tree.

"Here's the upper end of the hollow," he called down. "Now you fellows start your fire at the hole down there, while I spread the bag over this hole."

The smudge was soon started, and fanning it with their coats, they drove the smoke into the hollow tree trunk. They were always careful not to let the flames of the fire get to the tree, or they might have started a forest fire that would have been disastrous. As a matter of fact, several bad forest fires have started from an unskillful attempt to smoke some animal out of a tree.

Soon there was a shout from the man up the tree. "I've got him!"

The smoke had proved too much for Brer Raccoon, and he had sought to escape by the hole at

the top, only to walk into the bag. In a moment more Tom had descended the tree with a squirming, snarling animal safely tied up in the bag.

On their return to the camp they were greeted by several of the jacks who had not yet gone to bed. The catch was exhibited, and one of the men produced an old dog collar from the bunkhouse. The collar was snapped on the coon's neck, a stout rope was attached to the ring in the corner to be later tied securely to a nail at the corner of the bunkhouse.

"There," remarked Tom, surveying the result of the night's catch. "If you fellows will lay off and not tease him, and shinny out a little food for him once in a while, he'll get tame as a kitten, and they are a lot of fun when they get tame. Almost as good as a monkey."

"We'll have to keep Sandy tied up for a while when he is not with us, or he'll make short work of that coon," remarked Garry.

"Oh, I'll have 'em as friendly as two brothers in a few days," was Tom's verdict.

The boys later found that the man Tom had a reputation for being quite a hand with animals of every description, but future events will show why Sandy and the coon never got well acquainted. Things were on the verge of beginning to hum for all hands.

When the boys woke in the morning, they made two startling discoveries. The first one was that repeated calls failed to bring Sandy to them, and the boys had never remembered the morning when Sandy went so far abroad that a few whistles did not bring him back on the run to join his companions.

The second surprise was found when Garry noticed a familiar looking roll of birch bark at the entrance to the cabin, weighted down by a stone!

CHAPTER VIII

WORD FROM THE HERMIT

"Look here, you chaps," called Garry, as he gazed at the little roll of bark, which he had not yet picked up. The boys crowded around and looked at him in amazement.

"Without making any rash bets," announced Garry, "I'll wager my best rifle against a plugged nickel, that one of our friends has been in this vicinity within the past few hours. Cast your eyes on that roll of bark, and tell me if you dare that we won't find a funny cryptic little message in it!"

"The Hermit!" burst out Dick and Phil almost in one breath.

"That's my guess. Now we'll see if we are right," and Garry stooped and picked up the little roll from its resting place beneath the stone. "It's the Hermit, and it's just the kind of a note I expected to find. Listen to this. 'Unseen watchers often give the best aid. When you need me most, I'll be with you.' And it's signed with his old

mark, the lone pine with the crossmarked boulder," said Garry as he had finished reading.

"Well, if that doesn't beat anything I ever heard of," said Dick. "How in the name of all that's wonderful did he ever find us in this part of the country?"

"I think I can answer that," interrupted Phil. "He must have run across Nate Webster and asked about us. It is likely that Nate told him where we were going, and since he knew that we were good friends, might have given him an inkling of the business that we were here on. The thing that puzzles me is why he should not have waited and seen us, or even waked us up to say howdy."

"Well, you know what a queer old codger he was, and this latest stunt is typical of him. Much as I would like to see him, I confess I would have been a little bit disappointed if he had not done something out of the ordinary," replied Garry.

"Wonder where he went after he left the note?" queried Dick.

"Oh, he's probably somewhere out in the woods, you know life in the open woods is nothing to him, after all the years that he must have lived in them. The main question now, since we can do nothing about our friend the Hermit, as he will come in his own good time, is to see what has happened to

Sandy. I cannot understand his going away. He may have chased up some animal, and if so he will be back. But it is unusual for him ever to stir away from where we are sleeping until he knows that we are up and about."

Throughout the morning they searched every nook and corner of the camp, going almost to the edge of the cutting operations, asking all the workers they met whether or not the dog had been seen. Their search was of no avail. The day dragged on, still no Sandy, and each passing hour made the chums more downcast.

"I'm beginning to think that this is step number two to drive us out," gritted Garry between his teeth. "I tell you this, boys, if it is so, and I'm inclined to believe it more and more, if any harm comes to Sandy through the machinations of this crew that are trying to ruin Dad's business, there's going to be one of the sweetest little wars started that Barrows and his whole crew ever even dreamed of."

"I'm with you, Garry. That dog was more than human, and the best friend that a bunch of chums like us could ever hope to have," replied Dick as he patted his friend on the shoulder. Phil said nothing, but the others could see by the tightening of the corners of his mouth,—the danger signal

when Phil was really aroused over anything,—that he was with them to the end.

"There doesn't seem to be anything that we can do. I've looked carefully over the ground for any signs of a struggle, but I can find nothing. There was some trickery of some kind to get Sandy away. It may have been done only to steal him and possibly sell him, but it may be that there was a foul purpose in getting the dog away from us. The time has come for real action. Let's get going early in the morning and keep our eyes and ears sharply on the lookout. Phil, you watch the cookee closely and see if there are any more midnight appointments to be made. Dick, you look out for the sawmill, and see if there is any funny business being done with the saw. You know enough about machinery to be able to detect if it is working properly, and your common sense will tell you if there seems to be a slackening up of production. It stands to reason that the boss of the sawmill must be in on this scheme, for more delay can be caused here than anywhere else. It is unlikely that there are many men in on this plot. Too many would make it unsafe for the conspirators, they couldn't all keep their mouths shut. I'll keep an eye on Barrows and see what conferences he holds with the men. I hope that Howells gets back here soon, I feel that we need immediate advice from

someone who is more experienced in the lumbering business than we are. Now let's hop to it."

The two boys did as their leader had directed. Phil ambled off to the cookhouse with the intention of offering his services in peeling potatoes to the cookee in order that he might have an excuse for keeping near the fellow. Dick at once made for the sawmill.

When he arrived there, the busy hum of activity seemed to be all about him. But as he watched he became conscious of the fact that there seemed to be several things that delayed the game. The man who drove one of the tractors seemed to be having continual trouble with the engine, and several minutes on each trip were consumed in needless repairs. Dick could see with half an eye that there was little the trouble with the engine except that which was created by the driver himself. The man kept up a continual stream of grumbling at the way the engine was acting, evidently to make the trouble appear to be real.

Once Dick saw that there was a loose wire connection which the driver purposely overlooked, and after he had watched the man waste ten minutes in needless overhauling, he stepped up and offered his services.

The man refused with a growl and an oath. Dick managed to restrain his temper, although he wanted

to tell the man how evident his stalling around was.

"Oh, all right, I don't mean to interfere with your business, but your wire to your battery is unconnected," and Dick turned on his heel.

Seeing that Dick really knew what he was talking about, the driver attached the wire and in a moment or two was off for another load of logs.

"If he wastes that much time every trip," thought Dick to himself, "he might just as well try to bring in the logs on his back. In the course of a week that would mean almost a day's production gone to waste, and I haven't watched long enough to know how much time he takes on his trip."

Quite frequently the saw would be stopped for a moment while the boss sawer oiled up different parts of the machinery. He did not seem to like Dick's watching him, but he was evidently a little wiser than the driver, and attempted an explanation.

"This is the last saw we have in the camp," he told Dick. "The ones that we ordered haven't shown up yet, and if anything goes wrong with this one, we are hurt and hurt bad."

Dick pretended a great deal of ignorance about the saw, but he could see that the sawyer regarded him with some suspicion.

Dick kept in the sawmill, but stayed as much as possible in the background. After nearly an hour of watching, a great log was rolled onto the car-

riage, and glancing at his watch, the boss sawyer called an assistant and gave him charge of the saw. Then he hastened from the mill and started in the direction of the camp, evidently to hold a conference with Barrows. Dick was turning to saunter out when he heard a terrific tearing sound as of steel being ground between heavy rollers, then a cry of pain from the sawyer. Dick turned and rushed to the scene. The saw was still grinding into the obstruction that was causing the noise, and several pieces of flying steel were in the air. The sawyer had his hands clasped to his face, and the blood was streaming from between his fingers.

Dick saw that there was no one with presence of mind enough to throw the lever that shut off the saw, and he ran and threw off the lever. Then he returned to the injured man. The flying teeth of the saw had cut his face in several places, but fortunately his eyes were uninjured. That he had escaped being blinded was almost a miracle.

The thought that flashed through Dick's mind that here was an instance of what Howells had told them, of the spiking a tree in the upper part where it would hit the saw. Dick asked the old man who had told them how to fumigate their shack the day before if he could roll back the saw without starting up the engine and causing more teeth to be broken and start flying about the place.

In a few minutes the old timer had worked the saw back so that Dick could examine it. It required only a moment to see that the saw was irreparably ruined. Most of the teeth had been bent or broken off, and a further examination showed that several parts of the saw carriage and control had been broken or strained by the unwonted burden that had been put on them.

At this moment the boss sawyer and Barrows, the manager, had come rushing up to the mill to inquire what was the trouble. Garry was with them, and Dick gave him a significant look, unobserved by the others.

"What's all the trouble?" inquired Barrows needlessly, for he could see with half an eye the damage that had been wrought.

"Seems as if your saw was a total wreck," answered Dick. "Must have struck a ton of metal in the heart of that tree to do all that damage."

"Nonsense," cried Barrows. "Whoever heard of metal in a tree?"

"Could it have been a defective saw?" inquired Garry soberly, for the purpose of hearing what reply Barrows would make.

"Yes, that's what it must have been, a defective saw," repeated the manager, parrot fashion.

"Defective saw me eye," broke in the old helper. "That tree has been spiked and spiked good and

plenty. That's the second saw that went that way this summer. Tother time it nearly killed the sawyer when the belt flew off and almost got him tangled up in the machinery. There's one sure way to find out what caused it, and that's to roll her off the carriage and split off that place where the saw started to eat through. If there isn't a spike there, you can have my month's wages."

"You seem to know all about it, and perhaps we shall find out why you know so much about the matter," and Barrows favored the old man with a look that boded no good to him.

In the face of the old timer's statement, and because Dick and Garry were looking at the manager as though they expected him to take speedy action, there was nothing for Barrows to do but follow the suggestion and order the log rolled off. This was done, and then several wedges were driven in, and using the backs of single bitted axes, the section of tree was soon split open. There plainly revealed to view were several bent, cut and twisted spikes!

"That's what broke your saw," exclaimed the old man. "Shame, too, a nice saw like that ruined and the only one in the camp at that!"

"That will do, Collins," cut in Barrows sharply. "Your opinion wasn't asked. Besides, I am still

wondering how your knowledge of the spiking seemed to prove so accurate."

"I was raised in the woods, and I know all the little tricks. There's dirty work afoot here somewhere," returned old Collins staunchly.

"Yes, I guess you do know all the tricks, but I know a good one, too; you go and get your pay from the timekeeper and start on your way," ground out the manager.

"Isn't that just a trifle hasty, Mr. Barrows?" cut in Garry.

"Listen, my boy. With all due respect to the son of my employer, I must say that I am manager of this camp, and what I say goes. You know I am protecting your father's business, and there has been so much funny business going on lately that something must be done, and I am going to begin by cutting out all the suspicious characters. In my judgment Collins is such a character."

"Huh," muttered Dick in an undertone. "A fine protector you are, and you know that Collins is innocent. He knows too much, that's all."

Old Collins marched out of the mill section and started toward the office. A moment later Dick unobtrusively followed him. In a few seconds he had caught up with the man and said goodbye to him.

"Goodbye, my lad, and let me give you a warn-

ing. Tell your pal that his father's business is going to pot here. There's something under foot, I don't know what it is or why, but it's there. Too many accidents. You watch that Barrows and watch the timekeeper, and keep an eye on the two drivers with the moustaches. Throw in the cookee for good measure, and you'll have a precious lot of rascals."

Dick tried to elicit further information, but found that the old fellow either did not know anything specific, or was crotchety and would not tell.

There being nothing that could be done further, the manager and Dick returned to the office, while Garry went to the bunkhouse to see if he could render any aid to the man who had been cut by the flying particles of the saw.

At the office they found waiting their acquaintance of the attempted holdup, Arthur Howells. He acted according to the agreement and waited till they had been introduced.

"This is our scaler and cruiser," announced Barrows.

Upon the boys professing ignorance of what the duties of a scaler were, they received an invitation from Howells to come with him after dinner and watch the operations. Barrows heartily advised the boys to go with him and learn something of the

way in which the trees were spotted and the lumber measured.

The chums knew well that the invitation was solely for the purpose of getting them away from the camp so that they could confer on what was going on.

After dinner they sought out Howells, and after he had armed himself with a scaling stick, marked off in measurements, which was used to measure the trees, they wandered into the woods.

"Now, boys, what news?" he asked.

In a few words they told him of the events that had transpired since their arrival.

Howells was especially interested in the matter of the spiked tree, and was indignant at the fact that Collins had been discharged.

"Why, the old man was as honest as the day is long. He used to know your father a good many years ago, Garry, and he would never do anything that would harm him or his business," Howells said vehemently.

"Next thing on the docket," said Garry, "is to ask what news you have."

"I have something that will knock the feet almost out from under you. In addition to the trouble caused by the breakage and wasting, there is something even deeper yet. I always get the reports from the receiving stations of the amount of lum-

ber that is sent out. I know after measuring, just how much has gone out. Today my reports show that all the timber that is cut here does not arrive at its destination.

"What do you mean?" said Garry.

"Just what I mean is this. Somewhere, somehow, your father's lumber is being stolen en route to its destination!"

CHAPTER IX

THE BOYS LOSE AN ALLY

THE words of Howells stunned the boys for a moment. Then Garry delivered himself of a few vehement words regarding the thieves.

"We have been here only a couple of days or so, and yet we find that this logging camp is a hive of rascals and thieves. And still we have done nothing. We must get to work and nip this thing in the bud, else the whole summer's work at the camp here will have gone for naught, to say nothing of the irreparable financial loss that will be caused to Dad, not only from the penalties for failure to live up to his contracts, but the money loss from the stolen timber will mount up well into the hundreds I am afraid. Now we must put a stop to this thing. I believe that I will go out tomorrow and go to town and 'phone Father that he had better make a cleanup here at the camp. Perhaps we don't know just who the guilty parties are, but if we get rid of the whole shooting match we can stop it. How

much timber would you estimate has been stolen?" he concluded, turning to Howells.

"I can't say as to that. This last report is the only one that I have received direct. Generally I have been given what was supposed to be a duplicate copy of the one sent to Barrows. This time I happened to get the mail myself at the postoffice. Generally one of Barrow's men gets the mail, and it is distributed. This letter was addressed to me personally, and I have no doubt that the others were also, but were opened and doctored up to appear all right. That's a prime bit of evidence if we can secure the proof. Tampering with Uncle Sam's mail is a serious crime, and draws a long prison term. Now as for your going out of the woods tomorrow and 'phoning your father, Garry, I would advise against it. Nothing very serious can happen in the next few days. Little work can be done until a new saw comes, and there will be little shipping of timber except that which has been waiting to be transported. In the meantime, if, as your father is led to believe, this whole matter is a move on the part of the big interests to crush him in the lumber business, the firing of the present manager and crew will have little effect. Your dad evidently trusted Barrows, else he would not have sent him here. If he is guilty, you may be sure that the enemy, for such we must call them, made it

mighty well worth his while to turn traitor. What is to prevent the next manager from being affected in the same way? And even if a trustworthy manager were secured, the big interests can always bribe enough of the laborers to do all the necessary damage that would be required to spoil the season. My advice is to lay low for a few days and get evidence that will get the 'man higher up,' the one who is the instigator of this whole thing. Once you can spike his guns, there will be no further danger of trouble here, and also it will enable your father to take court action that will restore him damages for the stolen timber, and will also give him a chance to sue those who have harmed him so that he can make the penalties that will be inflicted in case enough damage has already been done to make him forfeit his contracts. I should say now that he was a good three weeks behind his shipments, and that is a whole lot in one season. He has guaranteed to deliver a certain amount of timber at its destination by the last of September. It is the middle of August now, and he must make every minute count from now on to get out the required amount. Get the man responsible for this business and you will have accomplished what you have set out to. What do you think of my advice?"

"Sounds logical, and I think we will follow it. In the meantime I have a hunch now in regard to

that stolen timber. I think I can hitch up a few things Barrows has tried to dissuade us from doing, and a certain lake in this vicinity. That's our next work. Now what do you propose to do, Mr. Howells?" asked Garry.

"First thing I'm going to do is to go straight to Barrows and tell him about the deficiency shown by the records. That will do one of two things, I believe; either show him up for a crook, or else show that he is straight and start him investigating the thefts. If the latter happens, which I am frank to say I do not think will, then we have accomplished a great deal of good."

Howells, however, had barely finished speaking, when the red haired cookee appeared at the shack and told him that Barrows wanted to see him at the camp office immediately.

Having delivered the message, the cookee sauntered off, and Howells looked at the boys with a puzzled stare.

"Wonder what's up now. Thought that we talked over everything there was a little while ago. Well, there's no use in wondering. I'm off to see his Royal Highness and find out what he wants. I'll see you after a little while."

Howells hustled off to the office and left the boys to talk things over among themselves.

"What did you mean, Garry, when you said that

you had a hunch about lakes and things?" inquired Phil.

"Why, you remember how insistent Barrows has been that we make a sort of playground out of the little lake, setting forth its advantages about swimming, fishing and all that, and has done everything that he can do to discourage us from going near the big lake. I have let him believe that we took everything he said for granted, so I thought that tonight, if possible, we would make a trip to the big lake and see what's what," Garry answered.

"I'm wondering if Barrows is clever enough to play the old trick used by conjurers and magicians?" mused Phil.

"What do you mean, magician?" queried Garry with a puzzled look at his friend.

"Why, you know a magician always directs the attention of his audience to the thing that he is generally going to do, figuring that the people will be on the watch for a trick, and will be so busy trying to find the hidden trick, that they look everywhere but where the magician tells 'em to, and in the meantime he has done his trick."

"I see," exclaimed Garry. "You mean that Barrows may figure that we will guess he has been discouraging us about the big lake for the very purpose of making us go there rather than to the

smaller body of water, where some sort of villainy may be going on."

"That's it exactly," returned Phil.

"I think you have a good hunch there, Phil, although I rather think that Barrows is not clever enough to dope out that trick. Still, there can be no harm in watching both lakes. Suppose that we take a little trip today to the small one, and then tomorrow night we will hustle over to the big one after the camp has turned in for the night. Guess that will be our best plan. Now let's wait for Barrows and Howells to finish their conversation, and we will trot over while I ask a few leading questions."

They waited a few minutes, talking over their probable course of action, and were about to set out for the office, when Howells appeared on the scene. Rage and disapointment were depicted in his face, and the boys were quick to take notice of this.

"What's the matter? You look as though you had bad news to bring us," said Garry.

"Well, it's bad news for me, at any rate, and I think also for you. I believe I have proof enough that Barrows is a crook from the word go. I have been discharged from my job as cruiser and scaler and ordered to leave the place immediately."

"Why, I can hardly believe you, what's it all about?" asked Phil.

"Well, it's a short story. I had hardly gotten inside the office, when Barrows told me I was through. Naturally all other thoughts left my head, that is about my errand, and I asked him why. He replied that when he hired me he thought he was getting an accurate scaler, and that the reports showed that the amount of timber I had reported was cut had not been delivered. Immediately I knew that he was on to the fact that I was aware of the shortage and was spiking my guns before I could do or say anything. Now I know that I have accurately measured all the timber that was cut in this tract. I was at school long enough to learn how to scale if I never learned anything else. Of course we had words, and I forgot myself and accused him of knowing that timber was disappearing, and he was covering up by throwing the blame on me. Of course there was nothing that I could do, so I told him a few wholesome truths and walked out of the office."

"Then that definitely settles Barrows' status here," said Garry. "He knows that timber is being stolen, and he wants to cover it up. I hope you did not connect us in any way with you while you were telling Barrows what you thought of him, did you Art?"

"You bet I didn't. I kept my head that much, at any rate."

"Well, we have lost a valuable ally since you must go away. I suppose, though, we could hire you as a guide and keep you here. Barrows could make no objection then," said Garry.

"No, that would be the worst thing that you could do. It would put Barrows on his guard, for he would immediately leap to the conclusion that I had told you everything. No, the wisest thing for me to do is to hop out and go back to town. Then in a few days I could get back here and see what I could dig up in the way of stolen timber. I think the most advisable thing to do would be to find out from some of the railway stations near here where timber is being shipped from, and in that way we could get a line on where it is going. Then you chaps on the inside can browse about a bit and find out how it is stolen. Between us we can secure evidence that will uncover the whole plot. I'm going out now, before they get onto the fact that we have had time to talk things over. In the meantime, take my advice, and keep your eyes open every minute. Eternal vigilance on your part is going to be the price of success. Not that I believe any harm will come to you, Barrows would not dare attempt that; but he could move so stealthily that you could not find out anything. Now I'll say goodbye and trot along. Good luck to you, and I

will contrive some way to get word to you of what is going on."

Howells shook hands with the boys, and then loped off to get his dunnage. The boys watched his departure sadly, for they had counted a great deal on the help that the young timberman could give them.

"Well, fellows, that puts it directly up to us again. We will have to work on our own hook and get to the bottom of this. Now let's have action. Tomorrow morning—it is too late now to do anything—we will take a little trip to the small lake, Kanamo Lake I think they call it; Dutton is the name of the big one, and start our search there. We will simply say that we are going off for some fishing and swimming. Now we'll go to the office, and remember, not a word about knowing that Howells was discharged." And concluding his talk, Garry led the way to the office.

Barrows watched them narrowly as they came in, but said nothing.

"Thought we'd get a little information about Kanamo Lake," said Phil, as they seated themselves.

"Yes," chimed in Garry. "We are going off there early tomorrow and have a little fishing and perhaps a swim or two. We haven't done anything since we got here but watch the timber cutting, and

that isn't a novelty any longer. What we especially want to find out is whether there is any canoe or boat on either of the lakes that we could use to get some really good fishing."

"There isn't a boat or canoe of any sort on either Dutton or Kanamo," anwered the manager. "But you will find that will not interfere with your fishing. Part of the banks are well covered with reeds, and early in the morning and after the sun has gone down you can catch a fine mess of pickerel. Throughout the day the bass can be caught from the bank if you boys are any hand at making a good long cast. I suppose as soon as the timber cutting is done, the tourists will begin to swarm here for summer camping, and then there will be plenty of boats and few fish. That's generally the way." The manager talked heartily as though relieved that the conversation had taken the turn that it had, and perhaps because of the information that the boys were going to get away from the camp. It was likely that he had expected some questioning because of the discharge of the scaler. Evidently thinking over the matter, he decided something in his mind, and turning to Garry, remarked casually: "I had hoped that the arrival of the scaler would give me a little extra time so that I could do some fishing with you and act as guide around here, but I regret to say that I found him incompetent and

was obliged to discharge him. He was careless about his measurements, or else did not know how to measure properly, and all our records are messed up so that it will take me several days to get them straightened out. Fortunately I know pretty well what's been shipped and can check against the bills of lading. Well, there goes the cook's supper call."

Following supper, the boys made excuses that they wanted to get their fishing tackle in order and retired early to their shack. They got to sleep early, as they expected a strenuous day on the morrow, and also hoped to be able to make a trip to Dutton Lake at night, hence wanted sleep.

Just as they were undressing, Dick uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"What's the matter, Dick, lose a button?" inquired Phil.

"No, confound it, lost that nice knife with my name on it that I bought in Bangor."

"That's too bad, lost your nice toy. Well, you should worry, as you have your sensible scout knife that will cut even if it hasn't a nice name on it," laughed Phil.

Early morning found them routed out with the dawn, and as they hurried for the cookhouse to get some supplies with which to cook a luncheon at the lake, they heard the cook and his helper talking

about some marauder that had been captured the night before and was locked up in the storehouse.

Neither seemed to know much about it, but the boys could see that the cookee was on tenterhooks, and several times tried to get out, only to be called by the cook and set to doing some necessary task toward the getting of breakfast. This uneasiness on the part of the cookee made the boys think that possibly Baptiste LeBlanc had been caught, and decided that when they had eaten they would have a look at the prisoner.

Barrows appeared when they were half way through breakfast, and the chums at once began to question him regarding the capture of the unknown man and what he might have wanted there.

"Perhaps he is the one who has been causing a lot of trouble around here," said Barrows. "I haven't seen him yet. Couple of the men found him snooping around the office last night, and after locking him up, woke me up and told me about him. After I eat I am going to question him, and if you want to get a little later start on your fishing trip, you can come and take a look at him."

This was exactly what the boys wanted, and they thanked Barrows for the invitation. They made a hurried meal, and then after Barrows had posted the notices for the section bosses for the day, they went to the storehouse, which was the most

solid looking building in the camp, being built of great logs with a thick double hasp and padlocks on the door. Inside were kept the cooking supplies for the camp.

The manager produced a key, and throwing open the door, called to the prisoner to come out.

The three chums pressed forward eagerly to see if they were right in their guess that LeBlanc or his evil associate had been captured.

What they did finally see nearly knocked them off their feet. There was a shuffling sound as of some one getting up, and then through the door into the sunlight, walked The Hermit!

CHAPTER X

THE FIRST HIKE

It was nearly a minute before the boys could find their tongues. The hermit stood there blinking in the sunlight, for it had been pitch black inside of the storehouse.

Finally Garry shouted:

"Hello, Hermit. Where did you come from?"

Barrows stared at the boys in surprise.

"Do you know this man?" he asked sharply.

"Of course we do," replied the boys, almost simultaneously. "It isn't so long ago that he was of great aid to us in our work on the fire patrol," added Garry. Immediately he could have kicked himself, for he had by this statement let Barrows know that the man might be of help to them again.

"What are you trying to do around here?" snapped Barrows, turning to the hermit. "Trying to steal something, or set fire to the camp or something of that sort?"

"That will be just about enough, Mr. Barrows,"

interrupted Garry. "We happen to know this old man, and I'll vouch for him personally. It is probable that he came here to visit us, and was wandering about when your men, naturally thinking him to be a marauder, seized him. You can take my word for it that he's all right."

Barrows evidently resented the way in which Garry had spoken to him. "I think I am the best judge of what to do in this camp, young man. I am not satisfied with his presence here, and it is my intention to have him taken to town and lodged in jail there until I find out what's at the bottom of the broken saws and such occurrences in the camp."

"Now just one moment, Barrows," said Garry with a determined ring in his voice, and a snap in his eyes that boded little good for Barrows. "I am not one who will naturally trade on his being the son of the man who owns this camp, but I give you ample warning that if my word is doubted in this matter, and this old man, who is as harmless as a rabbit, is not freed immediately, I will go to town this morning and take steps that will cause your instant removal from this camp. I have never asked my father to back me in anything that I was not absolutely sure of, and you can rely on the fact that he will take my word in this case, knowing me as he does. Now Mr. Barrows, you may take your choice in this matter and decide quickly."

The manager hesitated a moment, evidently trying to decide just who had the upper hand in the situation. Seeing this, Garry turned to Phil and Dick, and said:

"Boys, go pack up your dunnage and get ready to leave in fifteen minutes."

The two chums turned on their heels without a word, and were starting for the shack when Barrows, seeing that he was beaten, called:

"Never mind, boys, the old man will go free this minute."

He said it with a bad grace, and the glances that he covertly cast at the boys showed that he was enraged at the turn affairs had taken. What made him still angrier was the fact that the cook and two or three men had gathered around and seen him come out second best in the battle of words.

He determined to make the best of a bad situation.

"I am afraid that I spoke a little too hastily in this thing," he said, coming closer to Garry. "I want you to remember that I am always trying to protect your father's interests here; that is what he pays me for, and I thought that there might be something peculiar in this chap's showing up here in the dead of night."

Garry, having won his point, and for the sake of

future peace and freedom from interference, resolved to mollify the manager.

"That's all right, Mr. Barrows. Only I want to tell you this," and here Garry lowered his voice: "The old chap is mentally unbalanced, and it was largely for that reason that I did not want him to be annoyed. He lives near a tract of wild land where we patrolled early this summer, and was very decent to us, tanning skins of animals that we shot, and leaving us rabbits for eating. It is a pet trick of his to wander about at night, and appear very mysteriously, and as I propose to have him stay with us a few days, I wish you would pass the word that he is afflicted and caution the men not to tease or annoy him."

Barrows assented grudgingly and then marched off to the office.

Left alone with the hermit, for the cook and the others had departed for their customary tasks, the boys eagerly asked the hermit what he meant by his note, and if he had anything to tell them.

"I didn't mean to get caught," he said. "I know what you boys are here for. Nate told me a little and I can make two and two equal four. I was creeping through the woods last night to come and leave a letter for you, when I heard some men talking, and crept up to listen to them. They were just getting ready to leave and all I heard was a man

saying that his brother would soon be there and that he would know how to deal with those spies. I couldn't get a good look at the man, but he spoke with an accent, and was a heavy, strongly built man. That's what I was going to write to you, for I believe you are the ones that the men in the secret meeting meant when they referred to spies."

The boys looked aghast at each other when they heard the concluding words of their friend the hermit. At once the same thought leaped into the minds of all three. Man with an accent, heavily built and strong appearing. Brother was coming to help him. All put together it meant only one thing, and that was voiced by Dick.

"Jean LeBlanc!"

The others echoed the name of their Nemesis after Dick.

"What's that, did you speak of LeBlanc?" inquired the hermit.

"That's just what we did," replied Garry grimly. "That man you described, unless we are very badly mistaken, was Baptiste, a brother of Jean. And if Jean is on the way, we must guard ourselves every minute. And we must make every moment count, for once he gets here he will make strenuous efforts to get us in trouble, if not on his own hook, then in cahoots with Barrows. Now let's break for

the small lake. Suppose you stay with us a few days, Hermit, and help us in our work."

"No, that would not be good tactics," was the reply of the hermit. It would cause trouble to you boys with that man who wished me lodged in durance vile."

As was usual, the words of the hermit were anything but those that would be naturally used by a man that had lived the greater part of his life in the deep woods, far removed from all human beings. But the aged hermit was always surprising them, if not by his talk, by his unusual actions.

Garry had often thought that the old man was wise in his conclusions, so he asked what could be suggested.

"I would say that you should go the manager and tell him that I had been offended by my reception and consequently had refused to stay and visit you, going off in a huff. Then that will give me a chance to return to the forest and watch for the coming of LeBlanc. I will guarantee that I will not be captured again. I was too sure of myself last night, since I did not know that the camp was full of night spies, who held rendezvous in the dark of the night. I will warn you in the usual way if LeBlanc approaches. In the meantime, my instinct tells me that the man with whom you quarreled, Garry, is not to be trusted. Watch him. Now I

will go if you will give me some food to carry with me for breakfast. I am hungry."

"There's one thing I wish you would do first, Hermit," said Garry, calling him by the only name they knew, and which appeared to please rather than offend the old recluse, "and that is go to the nearest town and mail a letter for us. There is no one in the camp now that I would trust with a message, and none of us who could get away. I should have thought to do it yesterday when Howells left, but forgot it in the excitement of his being discharged."

Borrowing Dick's ever ready notebook, Garry scribbled off a brief note to his father, advising him to check carefully the shipments of timber, and telling him in guarded words, that he had several clues that properly trailed down would soon lead to the unmasking of the traitors in the camp. He folded the note and gave the hermit money with which to buy a stamped envelope, and on another leaf of paper wrote the address to which the note should be sent.

This the hermit promised to do at the earliest possible opportunity. He then proposed that they walk a few hundred yards out of the camp with him, so that they might select a spot where notes could be left without his having to penetrate the dangers of the camp at night.

This the boys agreed to do, and after a brisk walk selected a tree with a hollow, half concealed in it, and established that as the "postoffice." The hermit then took up his journey, while the boys returned to the office to tell the manager, as they had agreed to do, about the hermit's leaving. When Barrows heard their story he seemed relieved and was apparently only too anxious to ingratiate himself with the boys again, for he realized that he had overstepped the mark a bit in his words with Garry a short time previous.

"You should have brought the old chap back, and perhaps I could have persuaded him that it was all a mistake," but the boys were quick to detect the false ring in his tone.

"Now we are off to Kanamo Lake for our delayed fishing trip, and so that you may not get uneasy if we do not return by nightfall, let us tell you that we are used to making camp wherever we happen to be, and so will be all right. I only wish there was a canoe on the lake, and we would take a three or four-day hike, canoeing from spot to spot on the lake, and camping wherever we saw fit," concluded Garry.

"Sorry there isn't. You might make a flatboat out of some lumber, but there is nothing with which to calk the seams, and the task of dragging the lumber to the water would be almost too much to

bother with for the short time that you are going to stay here," replied Barrows.

As the boys set out on their seven-mile hike to the lake, they discussed the way in which Barrows was continually bringing into the conversation the suggestion that they were not going to stay very long.

"I wonder if that is a warning unintentionally given, or is the wish just father to the thought?" asked Garry. "I don't remember ever saying anything to Barrows about the length of time that we intended to spend here."

"Maybe it is just the wish coming to surface as you say. At any rate, let's not worry about that for awhile. We will have bridges enough to cross when we come to them."

The chums pursued their way through the fragrant woods, spicy with the smell of pine and balsam. Occasionally they heard the whirr of wings as a covey of grouse or partridge, frightened at the sound of approaching footsteps, took wing and flew away from the cover where they had been hiding. The sound of the birds brought to the minds of the trio the sad thought of the missing Sandy, for he had the canine instinct of most dogs to flush a bird. He had so often hunted with the boys that they had taught him to retrieve a bird as does a regular pointer or hunting dog.

"Tell you what we'll do when we get back to the camp tonight," announced Phil. "We'll offer a reward for the finding of Sandy. I think myself that some of the lumberjacks, perhaps that chap that took us coon hunting, recognized the value of Sandy and stole him, determined to sell him and make a few dishonest dollars. Sandy is worth more to us than many people would want to pay for him, and I think if we offered a big enough reward we might get him back."

This was agreed on by the boys, and chatting merrily of many things, they treeked through the forest to the lake.

They took turns setting the pace and so made brisk time, even Dick keeping up without grumbling, although there was no circus at the end of the trail to lure him on to greater speed. However, Dick smelled adventure in the air, and hence all his seemingly lazy ways dropped and he dug to the trail as if his life depended on it.

Soon they reached the lake, which lay like a jewel in the midst of the forest. For the most part it was surrounded by trees, thick and green. At the end of the trail was a slightly open spot, and a stretch of sandy beach that seemed to beckon the boys irresistibly.

"Let's take a short dip before we start exploring. I haven't had a swim for days, and I think it would

do us all a lot of good." Garry had been sweeping the edges of the lake with his field glasses, which he had brought along, and could see nothing other than an unbroken expanse of forest. Far down at the end of the lake was a slight opening which Garry judged was the outlet of the lake, although since he had not consulted a map, he could not tell much about it as regarded its direction and size.

The others were also of Garry's opinion, and Phil then came to bat with another suggestion.

"We must do a little fishing, also; for if we go back empty handed from a lake that is supposed to be filled with fish, we are apt to excite suspicion in the mind of Barrows, and set him asking us questions as to what we did while we were away. We don't need to spend the whole day at it, just catch a decent mess and quit."

"Right you are, Phil," answered Garry. "Now for a swim, and last man in is no good."

The boys ripped off their clothes, and so used were they to speedy disrobing, that all hit the water with almost the same splash.

"See that spot up the bank about three hundred yards, where the ground begins to rise?" inquired Dick, as he splashed about in the water. "Bet you fellows anything I've got against anything you have that I can give you chaps ten yards' start and then beat you there."

"Well, you sure thing artist, splash him good, Phil," shouted Garry, for Dick was an expert swimmer, much better than either of the others, although they were not unskilled in the aquatic art.

Dick was thoroughly splashed, and with two against one, was soon forced to holler quits.

"Tell you what I'm going to do; I'm going to swim up to that place and back, anyway. You fellows can come or not, as you please," and with a long, sweeping, underhand stroke, his head almost buried in the water, Dick sped away. The remaining two contented themselves with paddling about and noting the clearness of the water and the fine sandy bottom. They got a stone and amused themselves by throwing it some distance and then swimming under water after it and recovering it. They had been doing this for some moments, when suddenly Garry, thinking that Dick, with his speed, had been gone long enough to have done that distance twice over, began to worry a bit, and called Phil's attention to the lapse of time. They decided to swim up there and seek their missing comrade, who, although they had perfect faith in his prowess as a swimmer, might easily have been overtaken with a cramp, and met with disaster.

It was generally a rule that they keep an eye on each other in the water, and it was a strict regulation that a call for help be never made in jest.

"Let's go," called Garry, and away they started They had made less than fifty yards, when borne on the breeze came the sound of Dick's voice.

Garry stopped swimming for a moment, and began to tread water, while he looked toward the spot that had been Dick's goal when he swam away. Dick could be seen standing on the bank beckoning wildly to them.

CHAPTER XI

A LUCKY FIND

"Guess it's nothing serious, Garry," said Phil, who had followed Garry's lead and stopped swimming long enough to see what the cause of the call was. "It looks as though he had made a discovery of some sort."

The chums put on an extra burst of speed, and soon had reached the spot where Dick was standing.

"What's all the commotion about?" inquired Garry half breathlessly, as they clambered up on to the bank. "We thought you were calling for help."

"I am truly sorry I frightened you, but I just found something that we may need before our stay at the camp is done," and Dick led the way into the woods for a few feet. "I got out on the bank to rest a bit, and thought I saw signs of a camp having been here at one time or another, so I nosed around and tucked away in the brush I found this," and displacing some of the debris that had fallen

around the object, Dick disclosed a birch-bark canoe, made after Indian fashion.

"I should say that was a find," exclaimed Garry. "Now we can do all the exploring around here that we want to, and if we find nothing here we can portage the canoe across the woods to Dutton Lake and continue our investigation."

They were disappointed, however, for on dragging out the canoe, they found that a great hole had been torn in the bottom.

"Now wouldn't that jar you. I wish I had looked at it more carefully before I called to you," said Dick in a disapointed tone.

"Let your Uncle Dudley take a look," ordered Garry. After a few moment's investigation, he straightened up. "It can be repaired easily with what simple tools we have and a little help from old Mother Nature. Our only trouble will be a swim of about four miles. Two across to the point that I noted when I looked through my glasses, and two back to where we want to do our work, which had better be here."

"I think I begin to see faint glimmerings of what you intend to do," said Phil, as he scanned the end of the lake that came within his vision. Phil had abnormally keen eyes, and could often see things that the other boys required a glass to discern.

"Well, Sherlock, what do I intend to do?" asked Garry with a laugh.

"It seems to me, if my eyes don't fail me, that I can see a sort of a white clump of woods about two miles distant, at least the sunshine casts a brighter glare than it does on the green of the pines and spruces. Now to me that spells b-i-r-c-h. Am I right?"

"Right again. That's just what I have in mind. Let's start. We ought to be able to have a fine canoe by noon if we don't loiter."

They swam back to where they had left their clothes, and it was decided that Phil should stay behind to guard their clothes, packs and rifles. Garry got his hatchet and sheath off his belt, and tucked his knife safely into the sheath of the axe blade. Then by knotting two of the bandanna handkerchiefs that they customarily wore about their necks, he made a sort of a strap affair and tied the axe securely on his back between his shoulder blades. This left his arms perfectly free for swimming, and then he and Dick set out with easy strokes for their destination across the lake. They took plenty of time and occasionally rolled over to float on their backs so that they could rest. At last, after several resting spells, which were mainly for Garry's benefit, as Dick could have done the

whole distance without fatiguing himself in the slightest, they reached the clump of birches.

Resting a few moments on the bank, they proceeded to strip a good section of bark from one of the birches. This was a simple matter, as all that was necessary to do was to cut a girdle around the tree a few inches from the bottom, and another about three feet above. Then a vertical cut was made between the two girdles, and after about twenty minutes of prying the bark from the trunk with the knife, the two taking turns at the task, they had the roll of bark neatly cut off.

"Now if we could only find a swampy place around here where there would be some tamarack trees, we could get a couple of the crooked roots for which the tamarack is noted, and that would furnish us with a rib for the canoe. As it is, we will have to makeshift with that twisted birch branch that I see, which Nature seemed to have put there for our particular use today," and Garry proceeded to get the branch as he spoke.

"We can roll this up and tie it with a strip of handkerchief, and push it along with us on the return swim. Then it will be a small job to repair the canoe. "

"What are you going to use to attach it to the bottom of the canoe where it is broken," asked Dick.

"I have something in my knapsack. For some reason or other, while in Bangor, I bought a ball of extra fine linen cord, and one day while we were in the woods at Sourdehunq I needed some shoemaker's wax, and didn't have it, so last time we were in town I bought a piece. I never expected to use it to repair a boat with, however, just bought the stuff in case an occasion arose where we might need it. Now it will come in handy," and as he finished, Garry slipped back into the water. The return trip occupied somewhat longer, as the bark was a bit unwieldy as they pushed it ahead of them.

When they returned to the spot where they had left Phil, the sun was almost in the center of the sky, denoting it was near noon. They found that Phil had improved the time while they were absent and had started a fire and caught several good bass.

"Best fishing here I ever saw. I don't believe a line has been thrown in this patch of water for years, the fish just jump at the bait," shouted Phil with the true Isaac Walton enthusiasm.

"I also got a couple of pickerel that were so foolish as to leap at my bait, and have enough for dinner and some to take back to the camp with us tonight."

All were so eager to get at the business of fixing the boat, that they hurried through lunch with

extra speed. Then they sped through the woods to the spot where the old canoe had been found.

As Garry prepared to repair the boat, he began to laugh at something that seemed to be amusing him greatly.

"Let us in on the joke," asked Phil. "You are grinning there to yourself like a Cheshire cat."

"I was just thinking that either Barrows is a fool or takes us for brainless idiots. The idea of telling us that there was nothing in the camp with which a boat could be calked, and there are only some hundreds of square miles in the state just full of the finest thing in the world. Nothing more than the pitch on the pine trees all around us."

"I noticed it this morning when the manager remarked about it, but thought it just as well to keep my knowledge to myself," remarked Dick.

"All right, then, you fellows set to work with your knives and dig a lot of those pitch lumps off the trees and then start a fire and melt it in your drinking cup. It will spoil the cup, but we can easily get another one," directed Garry.

The boys immediately set about doing his bidding, and as they worked, Garry got out his knapsack and proceeded to rummage through it for the linen cord and the shoemaker's wax. Having found them, he set to work to wax the cord thoroughly, making it less likely to shrink. Next he

examined the broken rib of the canoe, and determined how much of the birch branch he would need to repair it. He took his knife and shaved a long diagonal slant on the piece of rib in the canoe, then matched the slant on the piece of branch. Having fixed them so they would fit, he took a piece of fishing line and wound it carefully around the joint, starting several inches above where the two pieces joined, and continuing for several inches onto the firm wood beyond the spot where the repair was made. This is called "splicing." Most boys have spliced a fishing pole or a broken bat in much the same way.

The rib having been spliced, the next step was the patching of the hole. Garry got the birch bark, and laid it over the gaping rent in the bottom of the craft, and marked a line around so that it overlapped the hole by about four inches. The extra bark was then trimmed away, and he was ready to sew it on. He took the awl blade of his knife and punched a series of holes around, piercing both the patch and the bark of the canoe. Having done this, he called for the hot pitch and poured it on around the edge of the hole. Then he firmly laid the patch on, and as the pitch cooled it formed a sort of a natural mucilage. Garry had previously waxed one end of the cord so that it would be easy to stick it through the holes, and working swiftly he threaded

the cord in. When the job was completed, he reversed his steps, so that the result was a firmly sewn patch.

Nothing else remained to do but to daub hot pitch liberally over the seam on both sides, and calk the edges where the patch was attached to the craft.

"There," said Garry, as he stepped back and proudly surveyed his handiwork. "That's a craft that will be as seaworthy, or rather as lakeworthy, if there is such a word, as one could want."

"Um, let me see," mused Dick aloud, as he looked over the canoe. "There's one other quite necessary thing to be done."

"Well, smarty, what is there to be done," asked Garry a trifle hotly.

"I was just wondering whether we would rig up a sail or have you a gas engine in your knapsack with which to make this gallant ship navigate?" asked Dick as he burst into laughter, in which he was joined, first by Phil, and a bit later by Garry, when he saw that the joke was on him.

"Phil, you're the handy man with the knife, what say to a couple of paddles?" asked Garry after the laughter had subsided.

"Have 'em for you in an hour. That's quick work, however, and I won't promise you a very handsome product."

"We won't bother about looks as long as they will propel the canoe through the water. That remark of Dick's about the sail, although it was intended to be humorous, isn't such a bad idea either, only there is no way that I can think of right now to make a sail. We'll browse around the camp when we get back and see if we can dig up a bit of canvas and make one of those lateen sails, you know those triangular shaped affairs such as the boats in the Mediterranean use," said Garry.

While he was talking, Phil had already set to work to make a pair of paddles. "Now you chaps watch me, and after I have fixed one with the axe, or as much as one can do with an axe blade, I'll get to work with the knife," he said.

Phil selected spruce about five inches in diameter and felled it to the ground.

"I hate to spoil a perfectly good tree, but in this case certainly necessity knows no law."

He chopped off two sections a little over five feet in length, and then proceeded to hew one swiftly into a board. This took some little time, despite the fact that he worked at top speed every moment. His last work with the axe was to fashion very crudely the handle.

"Now I am going to whittle just the top and a place where the hand will come in contact with the neck or shaft of the paddle. To try and smooth it

up would take too long, and all that really needs to be smooth are the places where we will have to hold it. If it was left rough we would soon accumulate a crop of blisters. While I am whittling, you chaps can fashion that other section into form as I did."

After he had whittled enough, Phil sprang to his feet and said, "If I am not mistaken, I saw an old bottle near the remains of a campfire, and that will be just what I want." He sped away to where he had seen the vestiges of some fisherman's fire, and soon found what he required. He smashed this against a stone, and with the fragments scraped the spots he had whittled smooth and free from lumps.

The second paddle was not long in the making, but the entire job had taken well over three hours. "We have about three hours before it is time to eat, and we might as well put our canoe to the test, and see if it works," announced Dick.

"Time to eat! Don't you ever think of anything but eating?" demanded Garry.

"Yes, sir; when I'm not thinking about time to eat, I'm thinking about what to eat," responded Dick promptly.

"Say, Phil, he's hopeless. What say we make for that outlet at the far end of the lake. We might just as well do that as anything, since we have no real plan of action. Then tomorrow we

can make a complete tour of the lake, and thus get a comprehensive idea of the whole body of water."

The canoe was launched, and the boys climbed in. Garry and Phil elected to paddle, leaving Dick to sit in the middle.

"If that patch will hold Dick up, you can be sure it's a good job, Garry," laughed Phil, as they pushed off.

"So that was why you chaps were so kind as to do all the paddling. I'm to be the happy little subject of the experiment. Well, if I get a ducking there is some consolation in the fact that you two will follow suit," said Dick good naturedly.

Garry had done a fine bit of work, however, and the craft proved to be all that they hoped it would. They made it dance through the water and were delighted to find that they could make much better speed than in the ordinary wooden canoe. The only thing necessary, however, was to keep perfectly quiet, as the balance of a bark craft is a much more precarious thing than that of a solid factory made canoe.

It took them but a short time to reach the outlet, and they beached their boat and started on a tour down the stream, which was a shallow, weedy affair.

Their early scout training, and their need of vigilance during their patrolling of the woods when

on duty as fire rangers had made their powers of observation especially keen, and it was second nature almost for them to note signs of trail that would be unseen by one unversed in the lore of the woods and forests.

They had walked about a quarter of a mile, when Phil's exclamation made them pause.

"There's fresh trail there, or I'm no good at sign reading any more," remarked Phil. The boys gazed at the ground and quickly saw that Phil was right.

With no wasted words, they turned and followed the slightly outlined trail. It took only a few minutes for them to reach a crude log shack, one that had evidently been constructed early that summer, as the fresh cut logs showed.

The door swung loose on crude rope hinges, and after debating a moment they decided to enter. They found practically nothing in the way of furniture. There were no bunks, but a pile of boughs had been thrown in each corner, and a rough table had been built in a corner of the hut. On this reposed several dirty tin dishes. The remains of the food were still fresh, showing that someone had eaten there within the past day or so.

"That means that they are apt to be back at any time, and so we'd better light out. It may be some camper and it may be some enemy. I am inclined

to think it the latter, for a camper would have taken some pains to make things just a little bit more comfortable," said Garry. "I think, however, we will plan to keep watch of this place and see who happens to occupy it."

"Well, I can tell you right now that it is someone from the logging camp. One of those who are mixed up in the trouble there. Look under that table on the floor!"

CHAPTER XII

DICK DISAPPEARS

THE others bent forward curiously and gazed at the floor. There, laying in a little mess of debris, as though it had slipped from the pocket of some one who had been sitting at the table, was the knife with Dick's name on it, that he had bought of the sidewalk merchant in Bangor!

"Isn't that conclusive proof that it's someone from the camp?" demanded Dick as he rescued the knife.

"It surely is, and they are up to no good. Why should anyone from the cutting have a place over here? It's a signal for us to get out and get out quick. There's one good thing, though, we can set the hermit to watching over here and leave ourselves free to go about other business. We'll pace out the distances and draw a rough map and leave it in the tree postoffice so that the old fellow can come over here and keep watch," said Garry.

Being careful to leave no traces of having been

in the cabin, they hastened outside. They had hardly gone two feet, though, when Dick darted back. He rejoined his companions almost instantly, and answered their puzzled stare with this explanation:

"I've just sacrificed my good knife. The thought came to me that one of them, the man who found it, might have remembered dropping it there, and would at once know that someone had been in the cabin if it was missing."

"Good headwork, Dick," said Garry approvingly.

They took it on the run back to where their canoe was beached, and soon were on their way back across the lake.

"I wish that we had more time without fear of interruption," said Garry, for it is likely that the occupants of the cabin have a canoe hidden somewhere along the bank of the lake. Safest thing now, however, is to get back to the other side of the lake, where we have an excuse for being."

"I am afraid that there will be little use in watching that cabin, however, for it is quite probable that Barrows will warn those who are living there that we are swimming and fishing around the lake, and advise them to seek a new hiding place," observed Phil.

"That's a fact," answered Garry. "Still there's no harm in trying. It was only by extreme careful-

ness in watching for signs that we discovered that trail. It was probably the one that the men use to get water, and the cabin is well hidden. One would not stumble on it casually in a long time."

It was sundown by this time, and they held a council to decide whether they would camp there for the night or go back to the lumber camp. They were all anxious to visit the big lake, however, and so it was decided to return.

"After the camp is quiet we can skip out and visit our other objective," said Garry.

Taking their fish out of the water, where they had been placed to keep fresh, they trekked towards home. It was about dark when they reached the camp, and about the first person they met was Barrows. He was all curiosity to know how they had spent the day, and they returned equivocal answers, being careful to make no mention of the canoe which they had carefully hidden before starting away from the lake.

The manager admired the fish, and thanked the boys for offering them to provide breakfast on the coming day. Pleading their strenuous walk and day as an excuse, they retired early to the shack.

Here a campaign was speedily decided on. Dick was to go back to the office and chat for a few moments, while the others slipped out of camp. This would make it appear that they were in the

neighborhood, and after a reasonable time, Dick could return and retire for the night.

Dick wandered back to the office to engage the manager in a talk about fishing and the possibility of a long hike to extend over a week or more, while Garry and Phil made for the lake.

The tote road that had been made to transport the sawed lumber ran for a short distance along the lakeside. Here there was a slightly wider place made so that the tractors that met each other could pass with ease. The ground was here covered with broken branches and debris of all sorts, well tramped into the ground. Garry flashed his lamp about and searched for signs of any sort, but seemed to find none. Then he went to the lake edge and peered about.

Some peculiar formation of rock made a sort of a ledge that stood about three feet above the water. This ledge interested Garry immensely, but he said nothing as he wanted more time to puzzle out the situation before coming to any definite conclusions. At the point where the tote road had been widened, there was a triple string of broad wheeled flat cars loaded with lumber.

"Now I wonder why these cars were left here," asked Phil.

"That's easy. The drivers knock off work at a regular hour, and when that time comes, if they

have not gone very far on their trip, they simply come back to the camp and wait until morning. That is to prevent accidents which running in the dark might bring about," said Garry.

"Hush, what's that?" asked Phil. Both boys listened intently. Far off across the lake they heard a faint chugging noise. Sometimes it seemed to cease altogether, then as the breeze stirred they could hear it, getting fainter and fainter.

"Phil, I've discovered the secret of the stolen timber or I'm a Chinaman. That noise solves the whole proposition. That sound that we heard is the engine of a powerful motor boat. And Barrows insisted that there was no kind of water transportation on either lake. Now why should he lie about it unless he had some ulterior motive in covering up the presence of a boat? This is the answer or I'll return from our mission and tell Dad I'm not bright enough to solve the mystery."

"What have you doped out," asked Phil, as Garry paused for a moment.

"Just this. I'll bet you a dollar to a doughnut that the drivers that are in on this timber stealing business have it so arranged that there is always a load of cars waiting here overnight. That's step number one. Now we have a rock formation here that makes a perfectly good wharf. Next you have noticed that all the chips and bits of broken

branches strewn between the turnout here and that strip of rock. That's just to hide the footprints that are made by the thieves. So far so good. How does this strike you? That motor boat that we heard is a big one, at least it had immense pulling strength. I know enough about engines to tell from the sound how good they are. That boat is probably used to draw a raft across the lake. Just after midnight, or some safe time during the dark hours, a raft can be backed against that natural wharf there, and in half an hour enough lumber can be carried from the flat cars to the raft to make it a profitable night's work. Why, the whole thing is as plain as a pikestaff. Phil, we've got everything nearly dead to rights now!"

"What's the next step then, old timer? Shall we hike out and write, or wire your father to come on so we can show him what's going on?" questioned Phil.

"Not yet a bit, there's still something else we must find out. Is this a part of the treachery to ruin Dad's enterprise here, or is it a private bit of work on the part of Barrows?"

"How's this for a guess? The people that are behind Barrows, meaning those that have bribed him to play false to the trust your father put in him, may have outlined this whole scheme, and offered to give Barrows as his pay what he can

make off the stolen timber. At the rate that it has been disappearing, one-fifth and one-quarter at a time, as the report that Howells received would show, and at the price which lumber is bringing today, that would be pretty good pay for one summer. Chances are that the interests that are opposing Mr. Boone are paying all the expenses. Their only idea is to put him out of business for breaking up their combination and going into business on his own hook. If that's the kind of men they are, I don't blame your father for getting out of the combination."

"I think you have the right idea, Phil. My, I wish we had our canoe over here. We could paddle across the lake and investigate the other side and see what is done with the timber once it is rafted over the water," said Garry.

"No use in wishing. Best thing we can do is hike for home and turn in. Then tomorrow we can make arrangements to go on, say a three day hike. We can portage the canoe across country, and hide out along the bank until nightfall. The moon is in its last quarter now, and by night after tomorrow it will be dark. We can paddle out well into the lake and wait for what transpires. When we hear the raft and motor boat coming we can paddle far enough to be unobserved and then follow it by sound. The boat will probably travel without lights

for two reasons. First, it is safe enough as there is probably no other craft on the lake, and secondly, they will not want to attract any undue attention. Then we can note the spot where the raft docks, and in the morning can follow it to whatever rail spur the stuff is taken. With what help Howells may be able to give us on the outside, we ought to have the thing pretty well in hand. What do you think of my suggestion?" asked Phil almost breathlessly, as he concluded.

"Phew, that's the longest speech I ever heard you make, Phil, but you sure said something every minute. That's what we'll do. Now let's get back."

The whole occurrence had taken less than an hour and a half, and when they reached the camp they noted that a light was still burning in the manager's office. On arriving at their shack they were somewhat surprised to find that Dick was not there.

"He's doing a good job," laughed Garry. "Either he is really interested in what Barrows has to say, or he is playing to give us time to do what we wanted to. Well, he can stay there all night if he wants to, I'm going to roll into my blanket and dream sweet dreams. Dick's a night hawk anyway most of the time. Goodnight." And Garry yawned and soon was fast asleep. Later development will show that it would have been wise on

the part of the boys to look in on the manager at that time. Had they done so, their work would have been greatly simplified. However, they were not mind readers and so days of trouble were in store for them.

Morning came, and when Garry, always the first one to awake, tumbled out of bed, he cast one look at Dick's bunk, and then rushing over to the other side of the shack, vigorously shook Phil.

"What's the matter?" demanded Phil in a startled voice, sitting upright in his bunk. "Anything the trouble?"

"That's what I cannot tell you right this minute, Phil, but Dick hasn't been here all night!"

Phil leaped out of his bunk and looked at the spot where their companion usually slept. The blankets were still neatly in place, and it needed only a glance to see that no one had used it that night.

The boys hurried into their clothes and rushed to the office building where Barrows and the camp officers slept. No one was stirring, and Garry was about to pound on the door when he saw the cookee coming from the cookhouse with a pail in each hand for the morning cooking water.

Garry called to him and asked if he had seen Dick that morning.

"Naw," was the grouchy answer. "Why should

I have seen him? I don't know anything about him."

The sound of the voices awakened Barrows and he came and stuck his head out of the window.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Why, Dick hasn't been around all night, and we were looking for him. Have you seen him since last night?" asked Garry.

"I haven't seen him since the three of you went to your shack last night!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE CIPHER

THE boys were dumbfounded by Barrows' answer.

"What's that you say?" demanded Garry.

"I said I had not seen him since the three of you went to your shack last night to turn in. Isn't that plain enough?" reiterated the manager.

"Well, all we know is that just after we got to the shack, Dick left to come back here and have a chat with you and get some information about the country, as we had some little thought of taking a week's hike up into the wild lands that lie to the northwest."

"If he started for this office he never got here, for I sat up late trying to straighten out the tangle that Howells left behind him. No one came near the office all that time. Perhaps your chum has gone off on some little private expedition."

Garry was quick to notice that there was a malicious ring in the manager's voice. At once the un-

comfortable feeling overcame him that their night's work had been discovered. Garry was at a loss what course to pursue. He could make no accusation of any kind, for Dick might have stumbled on some clue that took him off on the trail.

"Well, you can understand that we are a little bit worried over the matter, especially since this is strange country to Dick. He might have wandered into the woods and got lost." Garry knew that this was next to impossible, but he could think of nothing better to say at the moment.

"My advice is that you wait a bit, and you will probably find that he is all right. He'll very likely show up in a little while. I wouldn't worry'" said Barrows.

There was nothing to do for the moment but take the manager's advice, and the boys returned to the shack.

"Phil, there's bad business afoot here somewhere. At such a time as this, Dick would not have gone off to follow a clue without leaving us some sort of a note or even a sign. He could leave a half a dozen different signs that we all know to denote trouble. He hasn't taken anything with him. His rifle is still there and so is his pack. If it were some mission of danger that he had gone on he would at least have taken his rifle. Now what shall we do?"

"Let's give him till noon in case it was such a hurried matter that he had not time to run back for his rifle. We might even wait until six o'clock. You know we have always made it a rule that we should never be gone more than twenty-four hours on a search without letting the others know in some way that we are safe. Sundown tonight would not be exactly twenty-four hours, but it would be near enough," advised Phil. Garry agreed that this was sound advice and they went off to breakfast. They found Barrows was almost through.

"Why don't you fellows start out this morning and look for him? One of you could go in one direction and one in the other. If you know anything of the woods, you could soon find signs of him if he were wandering about," suggested Barrows.

Garry told him that they had decided to wait until nightfall before getting really worried. At this the manager allowed a satisfied gleam to show in his eyes. Both the boys were narrowly watching him, and noted this. After breakfast they came back to the shack, and once safe inside, Garry whispered to Phil:

"Watch every move from now on. That business of Barrows telling us to go in different directions on such a wild goose chase was entirely too obvious. He wants us to get separated. Keep your

rifle close by you every minute, and tonight we'll establish a watch same as we have done in the woods when there was danger near. First thing this morning is to go to the spot where we agreed to leave notes for the hermit, and leave a letter telling him what has happened and asking him to take a look at the shack on the other side of Kanamo Lake."

Hastily writing the note, and watching that they were not followed they slipped out of the camp and ran to the appointed postoffice.

Garry reached his hand in as a matter of course, and was surprised to find that there was a note in the natural receptacle.

He brought it out, and with Phil leaning over his shoulder, read it. It contained a distinct shock for both. Here was what they read:

"Attacked by men and letter to your father stolen. Hit on head and left lying in road. Use all caution. The Bear is in the woods."

The usual lone pine symbol was attached.

"Well, we are discovered, Garry," said Phil. "Barrows must have had the hermit followed and has read the letter. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he knew what we talked about last night. Question now is whether he was instrumental in bringing about Dick's absence."

"I am afraid that we have sort of made a mess

of things, Phil. We haven't given Barrows enough credit, or else we have been too sure of ourselves. There is a good chance, however, and this note makes me think it highly likely that Jean LeBlanc may have captured Dick again. You know he seems determined to do him harm, even more so than us, for he and Dick have tangled up three or four times now, and each time Dick has managed to elude him and make more or less of a fool of him. This naturally would make an even more implacable enemy of the vengeful halfbreed. •Let's get back to camp and wait awhile. We will pry about the entire camp to see if there is any sign of Dick, and also we will be safer for the time being. Don't think I am cowardly, only we want to take no chances if we are to help Dick and at the same time complete our mission here."

They returned to the camp, and as they walked, Garry tore the hermit's note into tiny, indistinguishable fragments, throwing each tiny particle to the winds.

The day dragged on, although they tried to make it pass quickly by searching through the camp. Night came at last, and they turned in. Before retiring they arranged for alternate watches, and also decided that on the morrow they would insist that a message be sent for Mr. Boone. The boys had almost decided that rather than allow Dick to

fall into greater danger by protracting the time of a systematic search, they would tell what they had learned to Mr. Boone and let him force the issue of the stolen timber.

It was nearly eleven o'clock and Phil, who was on watch, was about to wake Garry for his turn at sentry duty, when he heard a cautious fumbling at the door, and the sound of a low malediction when the intruder found that it was locked. There was silence for a moment, and then Phil heard the sound of someone breathing heavily at the window. He crept noiselessly to Garry's bunk, and holding his hand over his chum's mouth lest he make a sudden noise, shook him awake. Garry was aroused in an instant, and all sleep vanished. He knew from feeling Phil's hands against his mouth that caution was needed.

Having roused Garry, Phil crept back to the window just in time to hear a faint swish. Instantly he knew that the intruder was cutting the double thickness of heavy mosquito bar with a knife, and guided by the sound, clubbed his rifle and brought it down with full force. There was a howl of pain, and the sound of someone running away at top speed.

"Must have clipped that chap either on the head or the hand," whispered Phil. "Guess he won't be here again tonight."

"Looks as though the war was on. You roll in and I'll watch for a couple of hours now. Good thing we used our old trick of sentry work, or we might be in a bad position right now," answered Garry.

For another hour nothing happened. Then there was a pounding at the door and Barrows' voice was heard calling the names of Garry and Phil. Suspecting a trick, both boys reached for their rifles, and after lighting a candle, Garry covered the door with his rifle while Phil opened it.

Barrows stepped in and seemed to be taken back by the sight of the rifle leveled at his head.

"Why the military greeting?" he asked with an attempt at good humor.

"Taking no chances," answered Garry briefly, for he had a feeling that it was almost time to tear the mask away. "We had one visitor here tonight, and we didn't know what to expect."

Garry explained his statement about the visitor by briefly telling of the attempt that had been made to enter the cabin an hour previously. Barrows passed this off by offering the suggestion that some of the lumbermen were naturally ruffians, and might have wanted to commit burglary.

"What I woke you up for was to tell you that a man has come here with a note that he refuses to deliver to anyone but you boys. He's at my office

now, and all he will say is that your friend Dick's safety depends on obeying what is in the note. Of course I could have summoned some of the men and had him overpowered, but thought you boys might like to handle the matter for yourselves."

The boys put on their shoes and coats, for they had gone to bed almost fully dressed, and prepared to follow Barrows.

"Careful now," whispered Garry, as he passed Phil.

There seemed to be little need for caution, however, for they were unmolested on their way. At the office they found an unkempt dirty looking individual.

"Be these the boys," he asked of Barrows, pointing a dirty finger at Garry and Phil.

"Yes, these are the ones. Now state your business and do it quick," snapped Barrows.

"This letter tells the hull story," answered the man in a hoarse voice, and he handed a crumpled piece of paper to Garry.

The leader of the Rangers took the note and read it in silence, then handed it over to Phil.

What they read was this:

"Have been captured by Jean LeBlanc. Have been forced to write this letter to you. LeBlanc wants a thousand dollars for my freedom. You

are either to bring it with you, or make arrangements for its delivery at a spot known to the bearer of this letter. Warn you that any attempt to molest bearer will result in serious injury or worse to me. You know I would not ask this unless I were in grave peril. Don't fail me. Follow bearer's directions.

"Being emergency will ask ransom emphatically.

"DICK WALLACE."

"That's Dick's writing, sure enough. He must have been tortured into writing that letter, else he would never have done it," said Garry between his teeth. "Now Barrows, the time has come for a showdown. What do you know about this matter? Speak up, and speak up quick!"

"What should I know about it. I don't know what's in the letter about your friend," answered Barrows taken back by the tone of Garry's grim voice.

"How do you know it's about our friend?" demanded Garry quick as a flash.

"Why, the bearer here told me that it had to do with one of the three boys who were staying here," answered Barrows weakly.

"I think you're lying, Barrows, but I can't prove it. Here, read the letter."

He handed the crumpled note over to the man-

ager, who took it and read it in silence. Then he burst into a protest.

"I never heard of this Jean LeBlanc. Why do you connect me with the matter? I never even heard the name LeBlanc."

"You had a Baptiste LeBlanc working for you until Howells insisted that he be discharged, didn't you?" continued Garry implacably.

"Why, there may have been a man of that name. I remember Howells insisting that a man be discharged, but I never pay much attention to the names of the lumberjacks, at least to their last names. I leave that to the timekeeper and the section bosses. You misunderstand me entirely. I am ready to give you all my help. What do you propose to do?"

First place I am going to start back with this man here and look into the matter. Of course we have no money to take with us, but I am going to be assured that Dick is safe. You will get the necessary ransom from the bank at town, and thirty-six hours from now you will start with it to some place where this man will appoint. We will be there at the time with Dick. In the meantime telegraph my father to get here with all speed. Now, Barrows, I'm putting this matter up to you. If you fail in any way it will be so much the worse for you. I'm trusting you only because I have to in an

emergency. Don't fall down, or we'll make you the sorriest man you could ever dream of being. Phil, keep these men covered with your rifle until I go back and get our packs. Don't let them stir out of your sight or move a finger."

Garry concluded his words, and tearing a leaf from his notebook, wrote hastily for several moments, then left the cabin. Barrows made as though he would follow, but a menacing gesture from Phil made him keep his seat.

Once outside the cabin, Garry sped away into the woods like a deer. He was extremely cautious with every step, however, lest a snag or root trip him and disable him at this crucial moment. The note that he had written contained explicit directions to the hermit to get word to Mr. Boone by telegraph, and then see if he could pick up their trail and follow them. He knew the old man was an expert at trailing, and Garry wrote that he would leave signs on the way from the hollow tree postoffice.

The return to the camp was somewhat slower, for he stopped occasionally to blaze an X in a tree, or dig a slight hole in the ground with his toe. He wished that he had time to make a more distinct trail, but there was the danger that a plain one might be noted by one of Barrows' aides, and obliterated. He was trusting that the hermit could

find it, versed as he was in all the lore of the woods.

Back at the office with his knapsack and that of Phil, he asked what had transpired while he was gone. Phil told him that a meeting place had been agreed on.

"Now," said Garry sharply, "can you lead us where you came from in the dark?"

"Guess I can, came here in the dark," was the surly response of the guide.

"Then start travelling. Now, Barrows, first sign of any treachery from anyone in the camp will mean that first I'll shoot this guide and second anyone within range of my rifle. Now hike," this last remark being addressed to the man.

Out of the camp toward the northeast led the way, and as they walked Indian file, they took every step as though it were a path strewn with glass. Once outside the camp, having been bothered by no one, Garry called a halt.

Keeping a sharp eye on the guide, Garry whispered to Phil:

"Notice anything funny about that note of Dick's?"

"Not particularly, except that I took exceptional care to be sure that it was Dick's writing," answered Phil.

"Did you remember the last line?" he questioned further.

"I think I could repeat it over by heart."

"Then use your head and look for the very obvious code in the last six words," said Garry.

Phil repeated them aloud two or three times, then fell silent. Then he gave vent to a low exclamation.

"Why, it's as plain as the nose on your face. It's just the first initials and they spell Beware!"

"Exactly; that's step number one. Now the second thing is the note itself. It was written on brown paper. Safe thing to write such a letter on, anyone might have it in his possession. The queer part is that on the shelf high over Barrows' desk was a bundle of report blanks wrapped in the same identical kind of paper, only the wrapper was torn. I couldn't think of any way to clear the office, but I bet I could have matched this scrap to the torn place in the report!"

"Then you think that Dick has been at the camp all the time?" queried Phil half incredulously.

"Don't thnk it, I'm sure of it."

"What are we to do, then?" asked Phil.

"I have that all doped out. We'll let this chap lead us a couple of miles or so further on and then overpower him and tie him up and leave him there while we double back and search the camp."

Garry gave the order to march again, and they started on their way. Had Garry been gifted with second sight, he would never have left the spot where they had held the conference, for they had gone only a short distance when the guide asked them to halt.

"What's it worth to you fellows if I tell you all about this business? You ain't going to meet your friend where I'm taking you; it was just to get you away from the camp that I led you out here. But you can't make me tell anything, or LeBlanc would kill me. But I'll take a chance for money."

This sudden development puzzled Garry. He did not know exactly what to make of it, so he decided to temporize for a few minutes, and gain time to think.

"Where is LeBlanc now?" he asked.

"Right there at the camp was where I last saw him."

The answer was such a surprise that Garry's guard was lowered for a moment, then there was a scurry and rush of feet, and a half a dozen forms leaped out from behind the trees near them, and before either boy could make a move with his rifle, they were in the hands of the enemy.

CHAPTER XIV

DICK'S MISFORTUNE

Now what of Dick all this time? Let us go back to the night when Garry and Phil had started for the Dutton Lake to see what could be found out about the stolen timber.

Barrows, of course, had not told the truth when he said that he had not seen Dick after they had gone to their shack.

He had come into the office as had been agreed upon, and engaged Barrows in conversation about fishing. Barrows had chatted cordially for a brief while, and then excused himself for a moment to give orders to one of the section bosses whom he heard outside.

Dick heard him give the order to work on the coming day, delivered in a loud tone of voice, and almost instantly after the close of the conversation he came into the office again.

The conversation was picked up where they had

left off, and they chatted like old friends for nearly a half an hour.

Finally, Dick heard the cookie calling for Barrows to come out a moment, and Barrows obeyed the summons. Knowing that the cookie was suspected of being in league with the traitors in the camp, Dick walked softly to the door and tried to hear what was being said, but as they were several feet from the entrance to the office, and speaking in the most cautious whispers, he could distinguish nothing that was being said. Suddenly the cookie darted away, and Barrows re-entered the cabin and stood leaning against the door.

"Speaking about fish," he remarked, looking malevolently at Dick, "they are foolish things since they always take bait. Now did you three boys take me for a fool entirely, and did you think that I would take any bait that was offered me? I know every move you made since you have been here, including your letter to Boone. Why, you poor, useless boy, I am playing for too big stakes here to let a pack of mere children balk me. Your work was clever if it had been against an ignorant man, but you're done now."

Dick's heart sank. He knew that a cog had slipped somewhere. They had been too sure of themselves. Barrows kept on talking in the same strain until Dick began to realize that he was

merely talking against time. He rose to his feet and prepared to make a dash for the door, but realization came too late, for the door was thrown open and in stepped the arch enemy of the boys, Jean LeBlanc.

"So, mon ami, we meet again. This is a mos' pleasant meeting, but you are not to escape so easily this time."

There was hatred in the halfbreed's voice and in his eyes. Dick shivered inwardly, although he let no sign of fear be shown in his face or actions.

"All the better to have you here this time, LeBlanc, you just walk into our hands; and this time you will see the inside of a jail for sure," said Dick boldly.

LeBlanc's face darkened with rage. He made as though to reach for the knife that hung in his belt, but Barrows stopped him.

"That will do, LeBlanc, I'll handle this matter in my own way. Remember you're working for me, and you do as I say or get out, and I'll find another man for the job."

Dick was astonished at the way LeBlanc subsided. Evidently Barrows was a much braver man than they had given him credit for being; at any rate, he seemed to be the absolute master of the halfbreed.

"Yes, ma frien', you are the boss, but perhaps

another time, when I am not working for you, I will take care of this one. Now what we do with him."

"We will put him in the cellar under the storehouse for the present, then when we have captured his friends, we will have them taken to Misery Camp."

"Taking the others will be an easy matter, will it not? We shall just surround them like that and take them," and he snapped his fingers with a derisive gesture.

"That's just what we won't do. Why do you suppose I am going to the trouble of all this secrecy for? If it had been merely a matter of capturing them, it would have been done long ago. But they have been on their guard most of the time, and this camp is full of lumberjacks that worked for old man Boone. If they got wise to anything, they would have me strung up to a tree in no time, and one of the worst riots in the history of the lumber business would have been pulled off in this camp. No, sir, I am saving my skin."

"Why not get rid of those who would help them?" inquired Jean.

"I am, just as fast as I can. Everything was all right till these boys showed up to play amateur detective. Now we must make a grand cleanup and work fast. Things are getting too hot."

"I, Jean LeBlanc, am giving you warning. The bes' thing to do is to slip a knife in a place where it would do the most good. Every time they have cross my path, they have won, and Jean LeBlanc is not one who is easily beaten in anything."

"Bah, you make me tired, LeBlanc. They may have had a little luck and a lot of help, or else you didn't know how to do your work. I'm here to tell you that Gene Barrows will not be fooled."

Dick had been sitting silently all this time, drinking in the conversation of the two men. They seemed not to be noticing him, and in a desperate attempt to make his escape, he darted for the door and succeeded in getting outside. But his triumph was short lived, for he had no more than attained the outside air, when he was seized by an iron grip by two men, and hauled ignominiously back into the office. He saw at once that his captors were LeBlanc's brother, Baptiste, and the unknown chap who had been implicated with Baptiste in the attack on Howells.

Dick reddened with rage at the laughter of his enemies, and vowed to himself that somehow, somewhere, he would pay them for their taunts.

"Come, we are wasting time; the others may be back from their little spying expedition at any moment. Grab him, you two," directed Barrows. Baptiste and the unknown, whose name Dick later

learned was Fearon, seized him in no gentle grasp. One of them clasped a hard, dirty hand over his mouth to prevent any outcry, and they walked him across the camp to the storehouse.

Barrows produced the key and threw open the door. Once inside, the door was carefully closed, and Barrows produced a candle which he lighted. Dick was searched and his knife and matches were taken away.

Two heavy molasses barrels were rolled away, disclosing a trap in the floor. This was raised and a rude ladder was seen to lead below. Dick was mercilessly bundled down the hole, little care being taken as to whether or not he broke his neck as he slipped down the damp ladder.

Then he heard the clatter of the trap door as it fell, and he was left alone in the dark.

Once before Dick had been in a tight hole, and the lack of knife and matches had almost been his undoing. Thereafter he had guarded against this happening again. To this end he had contrived a secret pocket in the lapel of his coat, where a knife always reposed. Also inside of the sweatband of his hat were several matches rolled tightly in waterproof silk.

He got out the matches, and lighting one, looked about him. He surveyed the room with a quick glance, for the matches were too precious to use

too many of them. His quick survey showed that the underground room was bare of any furnishing; there was not even a blanket to sleep on. He lighted a second match and inspected the floor, discovering that both floor and walls were constructed of hand-hewed logs, and knew that it would take a week to dig through them with nothing but a pocket knife with which to work.

The underground room was damp and musty, and Dick shivered.

He wondered how long it would be before they took him out, and he began to do calisthenics vigorously to restore some warmth to his already chilled body.

For a time he thought of crawling up the ladder and trying out his knife on the trap door, but he had noted that it was of triple thickness of inch boards and would probably blunt and dull his knife without making any great impression.

There was one hope that someone might come into the storehouse above and he could rap on the door and let them know he was a prisoner there.

After some moments of reflection, he decided that this would also be unavailing, for the cook must also be one of the traitors. It was not possible that he would be unaware of the secret room, and was in all probability a member of the gang.

Dick was a healthy boy, and soon his eyes grew

drowsy with sleep. He laid himself down on the hard floor, and as soon as his bones got accustomed to the floor, dropped off to sleep, sensibly refusing to worry and letting the morrow bring what it would.

His last thought as he fell asleep was the hope that his companions would not fall into a trap as he had, although he half expected that he would be awakened any moment by the sound of the trap door opening, and the entry of his chums as prisoners.

But when he awoke in the morning, he found that he was still alone. He unscrewed the cover of his watch face, and felt the hands, finding that it was nearly eight o'clock. So far no one had come, and he wondered if he was to be given anything to eat. Two weary hours dragged on, and then the trap was opened, and a pack of food lowered to him, together with a pail of coffee. He looked up and saw the cook and cookee peering down at him. Evidently they were going to take no chances of a surprise on his part, hence their coming in pairs.

Dick called to them to ask when he was to be taken out, but they had evidently been instructed to hold no words with him, for they quickly lowered the trap and the barrels were again rolled into place. Dick's last sight as the trap closed was the leering face of the cookee. He managed to eat his food in

the dark, and resolved to ask for a blanket when next they came to bring him food.

The day dragged as though on leaden feet, but no one appeared again. Dick thought that dinner would be brought to him, but none came, and he figured that perhaps there were too many watchers who would be inquisitive if they saw cooked food being carried to the storehouse. Perhaps Garry and Phil were on the watch. This gave Dick a thrill, for if his thoughts were true it meant that they had not been trapped in any way.

Frequently he unscrewed the face of his watch and felt the hands to note the time. He resolved that his first step when he got back to civilization would be to buy a watch that had a radium dial so he could tell time in the dark.

Dick had no idea but that he would get out, for he was one whose courage did not fail. Then, too, he trusted in the cleverness of his companions to get him out of the scrape.

He was squatting on the floor Hindu fashion, about eleven o'clock, thinking that he would soon lie down and try to get some sleep, when the trap was opened, and Barrows' voice bade him come up the ladder.

He obeyed only too gladly, for the darkness and the chill of the cellar were beginning to get his nerve. In the storehouse he found that Barrows

was accompanied by the LeBlanc brothers. This made any chance of a rough and tumble fight with the manager and possible dash for freedom out of the question.

"Now there will be no fooling on your part, but you will sit down at this case here and write a note to your friends telling them that you have been captured by LeBlanc and are being held for ransom. That will please them, eh, Jean?"

LeBlanc gave a wolfish grin. "At least it make them hurry to rescue their friend. They do not like me, those boys, any more than I like them."

"Suppose I refuse to write that note, what then?" demanded Dick.

"Why, I think we will let LeBlanc handle that end of it," said Barrows.

Jean LeBlanc's face wore a diabolic smile as he took from his mouth the big-bowled pipe that he was smoking.

"Once I saw an Indian torture a man to get from him a secret," he said. "It was oh, so easy. All that he did was to thrust the man's fingers, one by one, into the pipe bowl, and after the fifth finger, the man gave in."

Dick shuddered in spite of himself. He had heard of this Indian method of torture, and knew that LeBlanc was not only capable of doing it, but would take a fiendish pleasure in the operation.

"Then if that fails, which I doubt, I give you warning that your chums will be seized on some pretext and sent out seemingly to jail with LeBlanc as their guard, and once away from the camp, will be given to him to do as he pleases," said Barrows. "Now do you think you will write that letter?"

Dick had resolved on submitting to the torture before writing the letter, but this last threat made him change his mind. He could afford to take no chances with the safety, and perhaps the lives, of his chums, by refusing to write. In the meantime his mind was busy trying to conjure up some way of warning them that it was a trap.

He took the scrap of paper that was offered to him, and began to write. As the letter drew near its close, he hastily constructed the cryptogram which our readers are already aware of.

Barrows took the note and read it carefully, turning it over to see that there was not other writing on the back, and scanning it for some sign of warning. Dick was afraid that he would decipher the simple code, but was relieved when Barrows crumpled the note to give it the appearance of having been carried some few hours, and then put it in his pocket.

He was ordered back into the cellar, and there was nothing to do but obey. The trap was closed

and he heard the rolling of barrels, then all was still.

Dick wondered what plot was in the wind, but was unable to puzzle it out. He finally decided that it was only another private scheme of Barrows to get money, and a thousand dollars would be a pretty good haul.

He gave up trying to solve the riddle, and lying on the floor stared into the darkness.

There was one chance in a thousand that one of them might come alone in the morning to bring him food, and he resolved to climb up the ladder the moment he heard footsteps above him, and with his pocket knife try to fight his way to freedom.

With this comforting thought, he dropped off to sleep.

Following the writing of the note, Barrows slipped back to his office and told LeBlanc to make one attempt to seize the boys, then if that failed, they would use their ruse to attract them from the camp.

How this attempt succeeded has already been told, and all LeBlanc got for his pains was a smash on the hand where Phil's clubbed rifle had hit him.

He hastened back cursing, and told Barrows of the failure, and after being upbraided was told to go to the rendezvous where the capture of the boys was to be made.

Barrows then went to the cookhouse, where the unkempt individual that was to act as bearer was waiting, and gave him his final instructions.

"Now," said the vindictive manager, "we shall see who wins, a pack of mere children, or Gene Barrows!"

CHAPTER XV

MISERY CAMP

Now let us return to Garry and Phil, whom we left struggling in the hands of their captors. Only one voice did they recognize in the orders that were given, but this was enough to let them know that they were in the worst kind of trouble. It was the voice of Le Blanc.

"Phil, that's LeBlanc's voice or I'm crazy," ejaculated Garry.

"Absolutement, ma frien's. It is LeBlanc. Once again I have you, and I think this time you do not go until we have settled several old scores that I have mark up against you."

As he spoke, several men took hold of the boys even more roughly, and in a few moments their hands had been bound tightly behind their backs.

LeBlanc gave the order to march, and the strange procession wended its way through the woods. It was almost pitch dark, but they seemed to be following a well defined trail, and the leader was sure

of every step. An unknown man grasped the arm of each boy and guided them so that they would not bump into a tree, and at the same time prevented a chance of escape.

The boys took things philosophically, for there was nothing that could be done with so many odds against them, and the darkness would have hindered any chance of flight. They knew that they could not take more than a dozen steps without smashing into the trees, and would soon be captured. They resolved, the same train of thought running through the minds of both of the captives, to wait for daylight before sizing matters up.

LeBlanc kept hurrying the men along, and they covered nearly a half a dozen miles before a halt was called. Now the first flush of day was appearing in the sky, and soon there would be light enough for them to see in what manner of hands they had fallen.

When dawn finally broke, both boys looked in amazement at the strange figures that the light of day revealed.

LeBlanc, of course, they recognized at once, and they had half expected to see his brother. But all the others,—there were half a dozen not counting the halfbreed,—were total strangers. The men were for the most part large and swarthy, unkempt of hair and ragged as to clothes. Their garments

were torn and dirty, and here and there was a raggedly sewn patch where the clothes threatened to give way entirely.

They were taciturn men, and said little or nothing to each other, and when they did, it was in a low tone. They paid absolutely no attention to any order of LeBlanc, always turning to one of their number for confirmation.

This man, evidently the leader, was a perfect giant of a man. He stood, so the boys judged, at least six feet four inches, and was correspondingly large of frame.

His face, what could be seen of it, for he wore a black, flowing, tangled beard, was tanned by the sun, as one who lived entirely in the open. His followers evidently respected, or at least feared him, for whenever he gave an order, they sprang to do his bidding.

Garry and Phil wondered who they were and what their business was,—whether they were hunters or what.

A fire was built and a meagre breakfast made. Phil and Garry were glad of the food, for they were both hungry and tired. The eating done, evident preparations were made to continue the march. Both boys were cruelly tired. They had passed a strenuous day and night, and now they wanted to sleep. But this was evidently not to be.

They were slightly surprised also when they learned from the conversation that LeBlanc was not to continue to the destination of the others.

"Now, King, you will take these boys to Misery Camp, and keep them until you hear from those who have given you instructions. They will let you know what to do, and you will be ver' careful not to let them make the conge, to get away, for then you will have me, Jean LeBlanc, to deal with."

"I'll keep my bargain, fer the fact that I give my word, an' a King allers keeps his word; but never think that I fear ye, Frenchman, fer I fear no man livin'!"

LeBlanc kept silence, and took his way back to the camp, while the weary march forward was resumed. Short rests were given at long intervals and the boys were thankful for the scant few minutes that were allowed.

The men walked with the long swinging lope of the true woodsman, and often the boys thought they would drop by the side of the road from weariness.

At noon a halt was called, and one of the men disappeared, to return after several minutes with a half dozen grouse The boys then knew immediately that these men were outlaws of some sort, who paid no attention to the law, for the close season was on all grouse and pheasant.

A fire was built and one of the men skinned the

birds preparatory to roasting them over the coals. Coffee was made and they were about to drink it black, when Garry bethought himself of the sugar and condensed milk in his knapsack. Thinking that a few favors on his part would perhaps return to them later on, he offered it to the men. The boy's hands were untied, and he rummaged through his pack until he found the articles.

The men took them without a word and used them. They divided the food fairly with all present.

Garry tried to engage the men in conversation, but all attempts failed. The rest and the dinner occupied about an hour and then the march began again.

"See here," said Garry to the man addressed as King. "When are you going to give us a decent rest? We're played out."

"Well, you can be played out ef you want; you've got eight miles ahead of you yet till we get to Misery Camp," answered King.

"What is Misery Camp, and who are you fellows anyway?" again asked Garry.

"Misery Camp is where we live, and we fellows be squatters. Now shut up and walk," and King relapsed into silence.

Light instantly broke over the boys. They had often heard of the squatters scattered over the woods of Maine, queer nomadic people, who gleaned

a precarious and lean living from the woods. Game and fish laws meant nothing to them. Birds of all sorts were shot, and woe be unto the deer that ran across the path of the squatter. Some little cultivation was carried on, in the way of corn and potatoes.

Wearily they trudged on. The last mile was almost agony to Phil and Garry, but they clenched their teeth and carried on, determined if possible to show no sign of weakening in front of these strange creatures of the woods.

At last Misery Camp was sighted. It was a patch of land that had been cleared away, evidently the logs that were cut being used to make the habitations of the squatters. A score of ragged children and some slatternly women came out to meet them, looking curiously at the boys. They were thrust into one of the cabins, and a guard established at the door.

The weary boys dropped on the rude pallets and fell asleep almost instantly. So tired were they that it was the following morning before they awoke. They stretched their arms and legs, and then tried to open the door. The guard let them out, and warned them that any attempt at flight would be followed immediately by a shot.

"An' I ain't missed a squirrel in five year,"

boasted their guard, who was a boy of about their own age.

Privately the boys resolved to make an escape as soon as possible, but not while the rifle of the guard was trained on them, for they doubted neither his ability to shoot as well as he said he could, nor the fact that he would not hesitate to do as he threatened.

They looked over the clearing with some curiosity. It fitted its name well, for misery seemed to be on every side. King, who appeared to be that in fact as well as in name, called the boys to his own shack for breakfast. Here they found that the squatter leader had opened their knapsacks, and the contents were strewn over a rude table.

Both boys jumped to see if their wireless 'phone had been broken by the curious squatter, but were relieved to find that it had not been touched.

"What's that there contrivance?" asked King, pointing to the radiophone.

"That's a wireless telephone," answered Garry. As he answered he had a vision of a way out of their difficulty, but subsequent conversation soon proved that they would not be able to put the plan into execution.

"I seen a telephone onct," said the squatter, "but it had wires. You don't mean that that thing will talk without a wire, do you?"

"Yes it does. Would you like to have us set it up, and talk through it, and have a message come through the air?" asked Garry, eagerly awaiting the answer, for he thought that if he could get the wireless up he could signal some way for help.

"No, I don't. I don't believe that ye can talk through the air without a wire, but ye might be able to an' I ain't agoin' to take no chances."

The squatter did not seem interested in the contents of the knapsack except for the little medicine case that Garry always carried. The boy noted, too, that all the foodstuff was gone.

"What be these things, medicine?" asked King.

"Yes," answered Garry briefly.

"Got anything that's good for chills and fever?" demanded the man.

"Not that I know of; most of that stuff is for use in an accident. You see it's mostly antiseptic and bandage and stuff," answered Garry.

King picked up a bottle that was marked poison and had the familiar skull and crossbones in red ink.

"What's this stuff with the red printin'?" he questioned.

"That's iodine; can't you read?" Phil broke into the conversation.

"No, can't read, never went to school. What's it for?"

"Why, it's to put on bad cuts so that you won't get blood poisoning, and it's good if you strain your wrist or finger or something like that." answered Garry.

"Wall, you don't say so. Wonder if 'twould do this finger o' mine any good? I hurt it the other day when I slipped near the brook where I was getting water. It's my trigger finger too, and that's a bad one to have hurt."

Garry assured him that there was nothing better than the iodine and offered to paint it for him.

The squatter evidently decided that it could do no harm, and so Garry inspected the swollen finger and liberally painted it.

"That will help take the swelling out, and it will be all right in a couple of days," said Garry, as he put the cork back in the bottle and laid it on the table.

Then he noticed that a ragged youngster about three years old had been watching the process with wide open eyes. Inquiry developed that it was the squatter's child, and it was evident that the youngster was the one thing that the squatter king was really fond of. He told Garry and Phil that the mother had died a year before, when they had been driven off a timber tract by the lumbermen. Here the squatter launched into a tirade against the lumber owners.

The squatter idea is a peculiar one. They claim that the woods were made for man to take as he found them and could not understand the right of anyone to drive them out; yet they are responsible for great damage to the woods. As, for instance, at this place, a couple of acres of fine timber had been ruthlessly cut to make cabins for the nesters or squatters, and to provide a place for the scanty crop of potatoes and corn. Then too, many of the great forest fires are started by the squatters. There is one case on record in Maine where the squatters set fire to a whole mountain side, because they said that the blueberries would grow better on the burned-over ground.

Also the depredations against deer are numerous. Many a fine moose or stag has been brought down to provide food for the nomads.

The talk went back to the medicine again, and the squatter asked what the skull meant on the bottle.

"That's put on to warn you that it's poison," Garry informed him.

The work of painting his finger seemed to mollify the old man somewhat, and he drew a little out of his shell, and Garry, seeing the opportunity, asked him why they had been brought there.

The squatter then told them that LeBlanc had appeared on the scene a day or two before and told

them that unless they agreed to keep some boys who would be brought there prisoners, they would be driven from the clearing by the lumberjacks. The squatters knew what this meant, since they had planted their corn for the summer, and moving meant that the lumberjacks would burn down the cabins and start them away. They knew from experience that it was useless to fight, for the enemy, so they considered the lumberjacks, would outnumber them ten to one.

Garry saw through the whole scheme and guessed that Barrows had known of their presence at the clearing and had kept them in mind for some time when he might require them to help in some of his schemes.

The squatter king took his rifle and offered to show the boys where their planting was done, and more for the sake of getting a little exercise than for any especial desire to see the corn patch, they agreed.

The other squatters eyed them as they passed in company with old King, but said nothing. Some of the youngsters started to follow, but a mere threatening look was enough to set them scurrying away.

"You seem to be the boss around here," remarked Garry.

"Yes, I'm a King by name, and I aim to be king

of these people so long as I breathe," answered the man gravely; and Garry, looking at his immense frame and stern eye, thought he had a good chance of continuing in his royal capacity.

They were looking at the corn patch with only a pretended interest, when they heard a scream from King's cabin.

"That's my baby," said King in a frightened tone. "Somehing's hurt her!"

CHAPTER XVI

GARRY SAVES A LIFE

THEY rushed back to the cabin and a sight met their eyes that stunned them all.

The youngster with childish curiosity, had climbed up on the table and captured the bottle of iodine. It was immediately evident that the child had drunk some of the poison, for its lips were stained. There was no telling how much the child had drunk, for the bottle had fallen to the floor, spilling some of the liquid over the floor.

The old man seized his child in his arms, and tears began to roll down his cheeks.

"Oh, she's going to die, she's going to die," he moaned.

Garry's brain spun with thought.

"Quick," he shouted to the old man. "There's one thing that will save her. What did you do with that foodstuff you took out of the pack there?"

The sharpness of his tone startled the old man

into activity. The words of Garry that there was one way to save her galvanized him into action.

"It's up there on the shelf back of you. Can ye save my baby? Hurry! Save her an' there's nothin' on this earth I won't do for ye!"

Garry had fortunately remembered that he had in his knapsack a package of cornstarch that they had brought to make thickening for gravy in case they did any cooking. Garry, and for that matter both of his chums, were pastmasters in the art of first aid to the injured. They knew that the antidote for iodine was cornstarch.

Rushing to the shelf, Garry snatched the package and tore open the top. His eyes fell on a can of mustard and he seized that.

On the ground outside the door Garry had noted a campfire with an old tin pail swung across it on a branch held up by forked sticks. Working with the speed of an express train, he dashed through the door and grabbed the pail of hot water.

Back in the cabin, he took a tin cup from the table, and hastily melting some of the mustard, made an emetic. This he gently forced the frightened child to swallow. Soon the emetic had the desired effect, and by this time Garry had moistened the cornstarch to the consistency of cream.

While the frightened squatter looked on helplessly, Garry fed the cornstarch to the baby, who

seemed instinctively to trust the boy, and made little fuss over taking the pasty drink.

Throughout the morning Garry, with almost the skill of a trained nurse, watched the child's breathing and kept count of her pulse. As nothing developed to show that the child was in any danger, Garry privately formed the opinion that the iodine had not gotten much further than the inside of her mouth, and that the burn of the poison had prevented her from drinking any great quantity of it. Then, too, the stain on the floor, where the liquid had sunk into the rough boards, was large enough to denote that most of the contents of the small bottle were on the floor and had not been swallowed by the child.

As the youngster brightened up, the relief of the father was almost pitiful to see. He grasped the hand of Garry and in broken, halting words thanked him for saving the life of the baby. At the door was a throng of curious squatters, and when they saw that the King baby was going to live, gradually broke away and returned to their duties. All this time Phil had stood by ready to lend a hand, in case Garry needed assistance.

"Boys," said the old man, "I've never broken my word before, but this is one time that I'm going to. It will mean that we'll be driven off here, but that can't be helped. You can go away whenever you

want to. My promise to that Frenchman ain't nothin' to me since you've saved my baby."

This was what Garry had hoped would happen. He did not want to trade the baby's safety for freedom, but there was still Dick to consider. He might be and probably was in grave danger at that moment, and it behooved the boys to return as speedily as possible to the lumber camp to set in motion the machinery to effect Dick's release, for they had decided that Dick was probably a prisoner at the camp. Of course they did not know of the hidden room under the storehouse, where, at that moment, their friend was still languishing.

"I'll make you a promise now," said Garry. "It happens that my father owns this tract of land, and I'll give you my word that you will not be forced to move from here for the rest of the summer. Of course the logging will soon extend in this direction and you will be forced off, but until that happens you can stay here unmolested. Now we're going back to start a young war at the camp, and release a chum of ours who is held prisoner there."

"You better stay here for awhile, for part of the word of the Frenchman was that another boy would be brought here to be kept. Now if you boys stay here and pretend to be prisoners when LeBlanc comes with your friend, you can wait till he goes and then all be freed together. In case there's any

trouble comes, I guess my men and I can take care of it."

"That's fine," said Garry. "I don't think there's anything better that can be done. When did you expect LeBlanc to come with the other boy?"

"The Frenchman was aiming to get back here by tomorrow night," replied King. "He'd have to start in the night time, which will probably be to-night, and get here some time tomorrow afternoon."

"How will LeBlanc be able to find his way in the dark?" asked Garry.

"I left one of my men behind to meet him and guide him," answered the old man. Then a thought struck him, and he asked:

"What are you all such powerful enemies for?"

Garry then told him some of the adventures that they had encountered, and the part that the half-breed had played in them. When he came to the tale of how LeBlanc had kidnapped little Patty Graham, the old man's eyes flashed fire.

"He's a treacherous weazel, that halfbreed. I don't mind some of the other things he did, but any man that will steal a person's baby ought to be cut into pieces. I'll tell you that. When he comes here with your friend, we'll just tie him up and keep him here and you can do what you want to with him."

This seemed like a stroke of real luck for the

boys. It would mean LeBlanc would be safely held until time for them to have him taken to prison to pay the much deserved penalty for his crimes, and at the same time would rid them of a dangerous enemy, as well as lessening by one the allies of the rascally Barrows.

The rest of the day passed quickly, and they told the squatter king many of the things of the outside world. He had heard little or nothing of the great cities, and had never seen a moving picture nor ridden in a railroad train. But he knew the woods as few men do, except perhaps the Hermit, although there was no comparison between this giant of the woods, who could neither read nor write, and the old recluse, who was eternally surprising the boys with a quotation from some poet, or a snatch of Latin.

"Now, Phil," said Garry, when they were left alone for awhile by the squatter, "let's plan a war campaign. As soon as Dick gets here, we will let him have a good rest, and then hike for the camp. We'll make it to get to the small lake without anyone seeing us, and there we'll get the canoe and portage it through the woods to the other lake. There we can hide out and get the dope on the timber thieves. Once we have done that, we have only to draw in the strings, and we'll have the whole job done."

Phil assented to this as the wisest course to follow, and night coming on, they turned in. The squatter had insisted on giving up his own cabin to them, which although poor and bare, was the best one on the clearing.

They whiled away the next day waiting the arrival of Dick, and hoping that no change would be made in the plans of Barrows to prevent Dick's being sent to Misery Camp.

It was late afternoon when a man whom the squatter king had sent into the woods to act as lookout came running back.

"He's got a young fellow with him," he told the squatter leader.

"Is it the Frenchman?" demanded the old man.

"Yes, it's a Frenchman, but," and here the boys met with a disappointment. "It's not the one that came the other time, but a fellow that looks like him."

"Tough luck; that's Baptiste, not Jean. Look King, I've changed my mind about having him captured. Let him go back and let the camp think that we are held prisoners safely here. That will allow us to work with greater freedom. Now we'll duck under cover and you meet the halfbreed and bring Dick here."

"Just as you say," said the old man. "All you

have to do around here from now on is to say the word, and everyone in Misery will do just as you order. I will, and I'll see to it that the others toe the line."

"Funny he don't come," muttered Garry.

"Oh, he won't be here for a time yet," said the chap who had brought the warning. I was in a tree top, and could see way down to a clearing, and saw them there taking a rest. Ain't nobody on the clearin' here that can run as fast as I can, and I came quicker than ever to tell you about it."

"Had we better let Baptiste see us so that he will know we are still here, Garry?" asked Phil.

"That's a good suggestion. Suppose you station a guard with a rifle outside the door, King, and let Baptiste have a peek at us when he gets here," directed Garry turning to the squatter.

"That's what I'll do. Here you, Job," turning to the youth who had brought news of the coming of Baptiste and Dick. "You take your stand outside there like as if you were guardin't the door. Now I'll get out o' here and meet them."

The squatter king hastened out, while Job stood before the shack door with his rifle clutched in his hands. Garry and Phil, with some excitement, waited the coming of Dick.

In a few moments they heard someone approach-

ing, and King threw open the door. "Here's your friend, he whispered, and thrust someone in. Bewilderment spread over the faces of the boys.

It was not Dick who entered the cabin, but Art Howells!

CHAPTER XVII

A GOOD DEED REWARDED

THE dumbfounded boys could only stare at Howells.

"Where did you come from and where is Dick?" cried Garry, when he had recovered his voice sufficiently to speak.

"If you will untie my hands first, I will feel better and be able to think. My wrists are all raw from trying to work the ropes off, but the man that tied me up knew his business too well," said Howells.

Since the boys' belongings had been restored them by King, they had their knives, and it was a small matter to cut the bonds.

"Now what do you mean by Dick being with me?" asked Howells.

"Why, Dick has been a prisoner at the camp, and we were given to understand that he was to be brought here to join us. We were prisoners here

ourselves; fell into a foolish trap because we were too sure of ourselves. Fortunately, because of a good turn that we were able to do, we have been set free by the squatter chief," answered Garry.

"What do you mean free, with an armed guard outside the door?" demanded Art. "I should say you were pretty closely kept in confinement."

"That is only a ruse so the suspicion of whoever brought any prisoner here would not be raised. As soon as he goes we will be free to do what we please. Now how did you come to be captured?" went on Garry.

"Oh, I made a fool blunder too. I wanted to see you chaps to tell you that a lot of lumber was being shipped from a place called Harrison. It's about five miles away from Dutton Lake, so that seems to show that the lake figures in the stealing of the timber. I crawled into camp one night and went to your shack, and walked in expecting to find you sleeping there. Instead I ran right into the arms of a couple of huskies who had me overpowered before I knew what was going on. I found out in a few minutes that the pair were LeBlanc and that precious scoundrel that tried to do me up that night you chaps appeared so providentially on the scene."

"Did Barrows say anything about what had been going on in the camp, or drop any word that would give us a hint as to his plans?" put in Phil.

"No, he was very closemouthed. There was a swarthy chap with him, who from your description I take to be Jean LeBlanc. All that was said was that I should be taken to a place called Misery Camp. From the looks of this place I judge that is where I am now. What have you run into, a squatter camp?"

"Yes, you've hit the nail on the head."

Garry was about to speak further, when the door opened and the squatter chief came in.

"That fellow is gone, and you kin come out any time you want," was the welcome news that he brought. The three followed him into the sunlight and then decided that a start should be made for the lumber camp at once.

"That is, unless you are too tired to start now, Art," said Garry.

"Oh, I'm feeling fit as a fiddle. I don't know that I'd care to walk all the way back, but we can save time by going part of the way," remarked Art cheerfully.

The packs were brought out and soon all was ready for the return trip. They were surprised at the appearance of King with his rifle, and feared for a moment that he had thought better of allowing them to go and was going to make them prisoners again.

"Just decided that I'll go with you fellows. If there's goin't to be fightin', and I think there is, I want to be in it. Besides, you won't be safe wanderin' around through strange country alone. I'll see that you get where you want to go in safety, and mebbe you'll find that a little bit of extra help won't come in amiss? Do you want me to come?" concluded King.

The light of battle was in the old man's eyes, and Garry at once decided that he might prove a valuable ally in case trouble arose and welcomed him to come with them.

"We'll take a little different way back, so we won't be liable to run into any of that gang from the camp. We'll go until you fellows get tired, then eat, and you can roll in while I watch for you."

This was what they wanted to do, and so they agreed to follow his advice entirely on the return trip.

"What about some of the men coming to your place to see if we are all right, or if they bring Dick with them, what then?" questioned Garry.

"In case any o' them come here from now on, they'll get a treat they won't like. I told my men to seize anyone who came, and if the fat boy comes, he is to be guided to a place where me and my men know, and then he can join us," answered King.

The squatter seemed to have covered everything necessary, and off started the quartet. King led them on a roundabout trail, and they walked until darkness fell, when Howells declared that he would like to rest.

For fear of possible detection by some prowler from the camp, no fire was built, and a cold bite was eaten. King refused to let any of the others do any work, and himself gathered enough boughs for them all to sleep on. Garry insisted that when King had watched for a while, he waken either himself or Phil, and they could provide a relief for a while. King protested that he was able to watch the entire night, but Garry reminded him that on the coming day there might be strenuous work, and he would not want to be handicapped by fatigue. This finally made the old man agree to waken Garry at midnight and let him stand a watch.

True to his word, King shook Garry about midnight.

"Don't believe there's any real need o' watchin', everythin's been quiet so far; but there's nothin' like bein' on the safe side."

Garry looked to see that his rifle was loaded and ready, then took a seat under a tree where he could be comfortable and yet hear anything. King laid down on the ground, scorning the boughs, and was fast asleep in a moment.

After about two hours Garry began to feel drowsy, and rather than run the risk of dropping off to sleep, he woke Phil, who had had a good sleep and was able to stand sentry for the rest of the night.

After they had eaten in the morning, the old man asked what the next step was.

Garry had been thinking it over as they ate, and so he asked King if he knew the region around Kanamo Lake. King answered that he knew every inch of the territory in that part of the state, and so it was decided that he lead them by a round-about route to the lake shore. Here they could hide out in a safe place, and after dark could portage the canoe across the timberland to Dutton Lake. Garry was determined to try and catch the thieves at work that night. Then plans could be made for a raid on the camp and the rescue of Dick could be effected.

It was almost nightfall when they reached the lake shore, and they thought best to turn in for a while before making for the spot where they had concealed the canoe.

* * * * * * *

To return now to Dick, who had been left all this time in the cellar. Food was brought to him on occasion, but always by two or three in com-

pany, and he had no opportunity of trying to fight his way from the cellar. Once when the cook and cookee came, he attempted to bribe them to let him escape, but they turned a deaf ear to his words.

Back at the office, Barrows was having a council with his henchmen. These consisted of the two LeBlancs, the cookee and the boss sawyer.

"Things are beginning to get too brisk here, so we'll make a good cleanup and light out," said Barrows. "I didn't expect when we started this thing that there would be all the trouble that has since come upon us. We've all done enough now to land us in prison, what with this kidnapping and everything. Catching Howells around here was what has made me suspicious. There's no telling what he has done on the outside. He may have written to Boone and told him what was going on, and that would sure spill the beans, for Boone would probably order me off the place and give me my walking papers. Then we would be all done. What I propose is this: We have already cut a good bit of timber and that has been sawed, thanks to the saw I had hidden in the storehouse. We would have wasted time, as usual, waiting for another, but this suits my ends better. All this timber has been left on the tote road, and tonight we'll make a number of trips and clean it up. Tomorrow night we'll

make a grand cleanup and then fire the sawmill and wreck the machinery and light out. By the time they have things ready to fix up, Boone will be too late to keep his contracts and my work will have been done," Barrows concluded as he rubbed his hands in evil satisfaction over his treachery.

"And the boys?" inquired Jean LeBlanc softly.

"I know what's on your mind, LeBlanc. Ugh, I'd hate to have you for an enemy. I suppose you want to stick a knife in them and put them out of the way."

"That would be safest. They know too much," answered the halfbreed.

"Well, I have a better plan than that. You remember we wrote a letter to decoy them away and mentioned a ransom. What's to prevent us from really getting one from old man Boone? We could stick him up for a big sum, and that would be clear profit aside from what the Carson people are paying us. King will keep them till we arrange things and then we could free them. After that, LeBlanc, you can do what you like; it will be out of my hands then. Now we'll start for the lake. Will the boat be there at the usual time?" and he turned to the boss sawyer.

"Usual time," laconically answered the man.

The door was thrown open, and a man walked into the room.

"So it's the Carson people that are back of you this time, eh, Barrows? Guess I got here just in time!"

The men gasped in amazement, for there stood "Moose" Boone.

In the face of this crisis, the only one to keep his head was LeBlanc.

"Seize him," he whispered sibilantly to his brother, in French.

Before Mr. Boone could make a move, he was grabbed by the powerful brothers. One of them clasped a hand over his mouth, and without a word, as though they had practiced for this very moment, Jean snatched a soiled bandanna from his pocket, and in another minute Mr. Boone was effectually gagged.

Barrows also had sprung into action. Rummaging around under the pine table that served as a desk, he brought forth a length of rope, and soon Boone was tightly bound.

"Carry him over to the storehouse. Don't put him in the cellar. This makes things better. We can keep him prisoner for several days and clean up. Lively now," ordered Barrows.

"Moose" Boone was carried to the storehouse and unceremoniously dumped. He lay on the floor thinking how foolish he had been to come alone to

a camp where he knew there was treachery afoot, but now it was too late to cry over spilled milk. He wondered where the boys were, since he had seen no sign of them about the camp.

His reason for coming was the note that Garry had sent him, and which the hermit had succeeded in having posted.

He twisted around several times in an effort to relieve the pain in his arms and feet from lying tied on the hard floor.

Nearly two hours passed, and then the door was softly unlocked and opened. In stepped the cook. Mr. Boone wondered what was to happen now, and he received the surprise of his life when the cook fished out his knife and proceeded to cut the bonds that bound him.

"Have you come to the conclusion that this was a fool thing to do? I am thankful, of course, and will see that you are let go when the rest of this gang is rounded up," said Boone.

The cook did not speak until he had cut the bonds.

"First, Mr. Boone, I'll tell you something and then I'll show you someone. I don't suppose you will remember a cold spring day nearly twenty-five years ago on the Umculcos, when you risked your own life to save a lumberjack that was trying to

ride a log and fell into the river with the logs crushing down about him?"

Boone's mind travelled swiftly back to the day, although he had not given it a thought for years.

"Yes, I remember pulling a man out, and then falling sick from the cold, and when I got well the man I had pulled out was gone," he answered.

"Well, I was the man you pulled out. I left the camp because I was only a fool young fellow and they made so much fun of me for falling in that I picked up and got out. I never knew you were the man until I saw you tonight and hitched your name up with the man who saved me. Now I'll show you something like I promised."

He rolled the barrels away and raised the trap. "Come up," he called into the darkness.

Dick awoke from a troubled sleep and painfully crawled up the ladder. It took a few moments for his eyes to get accustomed to the light, and then he looked as though he saw a ghost.

"Uncle," he almost shouted, for so it was that he always addressed Mr. Boone.

They clasped hands with a hearty good will and were about to exchange notes when the door was thrown open and Barrows and the two LeBlancs entered.

Each held a revolver with a steady hand.

"So, cook, you've turned traitor, have you? Well, it just makes another prisoner. Now Boone, it's no use trying to do anything. Most of the men in the camp are in my pay, and just to be sure that we clean up tonight and tomorrow night as we had planned, we have seized all the men we are not sure of and have them herded in the bunkhouse and under heavy guard. This time we'll succeed!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CAPTURE

We left Garry, Phil and Howells with the squatter king on the lake shore waiting for darkness. When it fell, they retrieved the canoe from its hiding place and started across the timberland to Dutton Lake. The trip occupied nearly three hours, although they made excellent speed.

The faint light of the stars pierced the blackness of the forest, so they did not have to stumble along, although the greatest of caution was exercised every moment.

They reached the lake without encountering a person, and then launched the canoe. They did not dare trust the weight of the four to the frail craft, and so it was planned that King and Phil should remain behind, while Art and Garry paddled out into the lake. They did not have to wait a great while until the chugging of the powerful engine in the motor boat was heard.

Paddling with the noiseless stroke of the Indi-

ans, they followed after a reasonable time had elapsed. They had taken only a few strokes when Art whispered:

"Here, we're going at this thing wrong. When that raft is loaded and starts back across the water, it will make too much speed for us to follow. Suppose we start now for the other side of the lake. Then we can lie off shore and wait for its arrival and see who meets the raft to unload it. That will complete your evidence, and we'll duck out for the camp and somehow get hold of Dick. What say?"

Without a word, Garry, who was paddling stern, gave his paddle a twist and the canoe turned in its course. They reached the other side and then lay off shore as agreed, giving the paddles an occasional twist to keep the canoe from drifting, for a gentle breeze was stirring the lake.

After a long wait they heard the approach of the motor boat, which, as was customary, was running without lights. Far down the shore they saw a light appear as though some one were flashing a lamp. It was probably to guide the boat to its destination in the darkness. When the boat reached its objective point, they paddled noiselessly to within a few feet of it, and beached the canoe. Walking with the stealth of Indians, they came close to where the boat was being unloaded.

"By jove, I know that voice," whispered Garry, as he heard a man ask:

"So this is how the trick is done? Pretty clever, I call it. Steal the timber and then raft it across to where you have your trucks waiting and hustle it to the railroad spur. Mighty good work on the part of Barrows.

"That's Carson himself; used to be associated with Father," whispered Garry. He and Howells were hiding back of a tree, well away from danger of being seen. At that moment Carson struck a match to light his pipe.

"Get a good look at him, we will want to identify him in court if necessary," said Garry. Howells nudged him to make him understand that he had done so.

"Now wait here," whispered Garry. Howells watched in amazement as Garry crept to the water's edge and noiselessly waded in. He made no sound as he swam. When he came back, dripping wet, Howells wanted to ask a score of questions, but forebore for fear of being heard.

He was about to come closer and whisper, when a form crept up to them and a low voice said:

"So we meet again."

It was Baptiste LeBlanc. The Frenchman then lifted his voice and called for the others. But he did not get very far. Howells struck with all his

strength and his hard nuckles took the halfbreed on the point of the jaw. LeBlanc dropped like a stone.

"Come, Garry, this way quick," called Art. There was no need of whispering now, for the men who had been unloading had heard the alarm and there was the sound of rushing feet.

"Into the canoe, Art. They can't follow us," said Garry.

Howells had intended a dash into the woods, where there was less likelihood of being caught, but he obeyed Garry, knowing that he had some plan in view. They pushed the canoe into the water, springing into it as they did. It was lucky that Howells was an experienced canoist, else the frail boat would have been overturned. As it was, they got a good start, and in a moment were bending to their paddles with all their might and strength.

"What's to stop them following us in the motor boat? We should have taken to the woods," remonstrated Art.

"Faster, I'll tell you later," answered Garry breathlessly. At that minute they heard loud imprecations from the shore.

By this time they were well away from shore and out of danger of a possible shot.

Garry began to laugh.

"No wonder they are shouting and cursing there.

I swam to the boat that time I left you and cut the wires on the engine; and to be sure, I took out the spark plugs, and have them in my pocket. It will be some time before they get that boat into condition to chase us!"

"Good boy," said Art admiringly.

The return across the lake was without eventful occurrence, however, for with them was the hermit.

Garry greeted him warmly. "What news?" he asked.

"I fear I am the bearer of bad news," said the hermit.

"Your father has come to the camp and been caught, so I judge from what I heard said by two men a while ago as I lay close to the road that leads here. Also many of the lumberjacks are kept captive in one of the shacks, and a heavy guard has been set over them. I think we had better go for help; we can't battle them alone, our numbers are too few."

Garry was for going at once to the rescue of his father, but the others restrained him.

"We can't do anything there, and we can be of great help on the outside. There is a sheriff in town, and we can get word to him, and have him round up a posse sufficiently large to capture the whole outfit," advised Art.

Reluctantly Garry agreed that this was the wisest thing to do.

"King, guide us around so that we can avoid the camp, but get to the road that leads to town. We'll get a posse and give them a battle," directed Garry.

Without a word, King led the way, and the others followed.

* * * * * * *

In the meantime, Mr. Boone and Dick had been led from the storehouse and taken to the bunk-house, where the rest of the prisoners were.

There were shouts of welcome when some of the old woodsmen saw Mr. Boone. Although he was the owner of the timber tract, and their employer, they hailed him as "Moose" and shook his hand energetically.

"By gosh. I'm ashamed to look you in the face, Moose," cried one of the lumberjacks. To think we let a bunch like that crowd outside there put it over on us; men that have fought with rifle and peavy stick when some crowd tried to steal the river from us. Gosh, if we had a few axes and peavy sticks now we could get out there and make that bunch look sick, but all have rifles and revolvers. Barrows must've had a regular armory with him."

They were still talking and trying without success to puzzle a way out of their predicament, when Dick gave a shout of joy.

"There's my knapsack. That lets me see light right now!"

The men looked at him in astonishment. How a mere knapsack could help them was not to be understood.

"That was chucked in here by one of the men yesterday, before we were captured. He saw it in the shack, and remembering it belonged to one of you, took it for safe keeping. It was Tom there, who brought it."

Tom was the man who had taken them on the coon hunt, and one they had been suspicious of, but here he was with the loyal men.

Dick hurriedly opened the knapsack. Yes, there it was, safe and sound, the wireless outfit!

"Now one of you fellows get up there and dig a hole in the roof; it only need be a small one, that I can slide this aerial up through. It ought not to take more than an hour."

"We haven't any knife," said one of the men. "They took away all our knives and matches from us."

Dick secured his knife from its secret pocket in the lapel, and handed it to one of the men.

"One of you set to work, and the others keep talking so that the guards outside will not become suspicious and look in here."

"Are you going to try something with the radio-

phone?" asked Mr. Boone, who was the only one who grasped what Dick's intentions were.

"Yes; it's our only chance. I happened to notice that there were two aerials over houses in the last town we passed through before coming to the camp, and I saw some radio apparatus in a store window, so evidently some one there has an outfit. Fortunately I have the receiving apparatus here as well as a sender, and we can find out if my message is received by anyone."

As he talked, he adjusted the apparatus, ready to send his plea for help through space and hope that someone would be listening in.

"Hurry!" he called to the man who was boring through the board roof with the knife. "It's almost time for the usual radio broadcasting stations to stop sending, and I want to get someone while they are still listening in, just as the broadcasting station closes."

"There, guess that's all right, unless you want it a little bigger," said the man who had been working.

Dick looked up at the hole and saw that it would do all right.

Most of the men were frankly incredulous. The thought of talking through a 'phone that had no wires was a riddle to them, as few or none of them knew anything about radio.

One of them suggested that instead of wasting

time with such a "fool contrivance," they try to tear away the boards from the roof and take a chance on overpowering the guards. This was discouraged by the others who, though they were by no means cowardly, knew it would be foolhardy to face guns with only their bare hands.

"Let's give the boy a chance with his infernal machine first," advised a grizzled old lumberjack. "Then if it don't work, we can try something else."

Dick adjusted the aerial, and then tuning up, got ready to talk into the transmitter.

"Some of you men keep talking over there by the door, and the rest of you get near the windows and block anyone from seeing in. Don't talk too loud, just enough to cover my voice."

For nearly ten minutes Dick repeated over and over again:

"S. O. S. Send a sheriff with large posse to Boone's camp. Owner and some of men held prisoners. Answer if you get message."

Then there was a crackling sound in the receivers that were clasped to his head, and with a thrill he knew that someone was trying to get him.

He adjusted the tuning apparatus with trembling fingers. The voice still sputtered and crackled. Finally he got the right wave length, and heard a welcome voice.

"Hello, are you sending help call?"

"Yes," almost shouted Dick. "Who are you?"

"Brown talking. My father is sheriff. Are you in earnest?"

"Yes, surely. Hurry posse on way. You'll need thirty or forty men. We are held prisoners in bunkhouse here. Captors are all armed. Be careful. This is last call; act quick, as I'm going to pack up radio for fear I will be discovered and apparatus broken. Goodnight."

"Going for Dad now, goodnight," came the voice. There was a sputter, then silence.

Dick turned to the men, his face gleaming with pleasure.

"There will be a posse on the way in a short time. The radio worked," he announced.

The little group of men burst into a cheer and were silenced only by the threat of the guards outside to come in and make them stop.

Feeling that they had done all that could be done, they prepared to turn in and wait the coming of the morn with its posse headed by Sheriff Brown.

The men rolled in, but Dick was too excited to sleep, and he told Mr. Boone, in a low tone, of all that had transpired since they had reached the camp. Of course he was unable to tell of the way in which the timber was stolen, as he had not seen his chums when they returned from their expedition that night he was captured.

Mr. Boone was silent for some few minutes after Dick had concluded his talk. He was worried about Garry and Phil, and Dick, noting his silence, asked him what the trouble was.

When he found the reason for Mr. Boone's worry, he endeavored to cheer him up.

"The chances are that they have not fallen into the hands of anyone at the camp here, else they would have been brought here with us. I am certain that they have discovered some clue and are following it up. Very likely they are searching for me, as they of course do not know I am here."

Being ignorant of all that had transpired, Dick did not know how near at that moment his chums were.

As they talked, they were being guided towards the road by King. It was necessary to make a wide detour in order to avoid running into a stray member of the camp traitors' party.

Garry was well saitisfied with part of the night's work. In the first place, he had proof that Carson, his father's business enemy, was at the bottom of the whole mess, and in the second place, he felt that he had so effectively disabled the motor launch that no more timber would be stolen that night. By the next day, he expected to have the whole gang rounded up.

They finally reached the road, and were half way

to the town, when they heard the sound of what they thought was a large auto truck coming towards them.

When they drew near the truck, they saw a dozen rifles leveled at them, and a stern voice told them to halt. They feared for a moment that they had walked into a new trap.

One of the men leaped from the truck and asked them who they were and what their business was.

"My name is Boone," answered Garry, acting as the spokesman for his little party. "I am on my way to try and locate the sheriff of the county, as my father and friends are held prisoner at the Boone lumber cutting camp."

"Well, I'm the sheriff, and I'm on my way there now. We'll look you over in a moment and see if you're all right."

The words of the sheriff surprised Garry.

"How did you know that you were wanted at the camp?"

"My boy picked a message out of the air with his radio, and that's how we found out," answered the sheriff.

Garry gave a shout of joy. "Good for Dick, he managed somehow to get a chance to use his wireless."

"Now," said the sheriff, "lower the muzzles of those rifles and come forward slowly. My men

have you covered and you have no chance for any monkey business."

Knowing that they could soon convince the sheriff of their statements, they did as they were bade. When they came into the light cast by the headlights of the truck, the sheriff at once recognized Art Howells.

"Hello, Art, guess that is all I want to know. These fellows all right? I know you well enough to take your word for it."

"They are absolutely O. K., Sheriff," answered Art. "We were on our way to summon you when you met us."

Howells' words satisfied the sheriff, and they proceeded to get acquainted all around. Garry asked if that was the pretext of the posse, for he counted only fifteen men, and was relieved when he was told that another truck with the same number of men was following them, but had been obliged to stop for a short time on account of engine trouble.

As they spoke they heard the rumble of an engine and a short time later the second truck hove into view.

"It lacks about an hour and a half of daylight, so I think we ought to be getting on. If possible we can surprise them in the dark, that would win half the battle for us. Not that I expect there will be

much of a fight, when they see that the law is after them," said the sheriff.

"I don't think I would trust the authority of the law half as much as our rifles," said Garry. "Those men are desperate, some of them, and if they see prison staring them in the face, they will fight all the harder, figuring that they might as well be taken for sheep as for lambs," said Garry. "Besides, they have two bad men with them, meaning the two halfbreeds, Jean and Baptiste LeBlanc. Jean is already wanted for a half a dozen serious crimes, including kidnapping and setting fire to forests; also he is an escaped jail bird. With that kind, it means fight to the end before being taken."

"Come to think of it, I've seen a notice in my office offering a reward for his capture. I'd like to get that chap, and I could use the reward," said the sheriff.

They had ridden as they talked, and soon were on the outskirts of the camp.

But something had gone wrong. A volley of shots whistled at them from cover, and they were forced to beat a short retreat instead of springing a surprise on their quarry as they had intended to do.

"Now, that's funny; how did they get on to that?" muttered the sheriff.

It later developed that Barrows had posted sen-

tinels in the woods along the road, and as soon as their approach was noted, they had, by a pre-arranged signal, passed the word of the coming to the posse.

This word having been received at the camp, hasty preparations had been made to receive them. The prisoners, about twenty in all, had been marched at the points of guns to the storehouse, and there were forced to enter the storehouse. There was hardly room enough for them, and little air, but they were crowded in like so many sardines in a can, while the enemy fortified themselves in the log bunkhouse.

The opening volley of shots had come from the sentinels who had closed in and fired as they ran for shelter to the bunkhouse.

"Well, we're stumped for a minute now," said the sheriff. "They could hold us off for a long time in that bunkhouse. It is built of solid logs, and bullets, unless they were aimed at the windows, would have no effect on that wood. We've got to think up some way of rushing 'em or smoking 'em out. Anyone got a plan in mind?"

"Yes, sir, I think I have," spoke up Phil. "As soon as it gets just a little bit lighter we can rush one of the trucks back through the woods to the sawmill, and there we can sheath the truck with some of that timber. A very thick bulwark can be

made, and that will halt the bullets. Half of the men can stay near the bunkhouse drawing fire with their rifles while the truck is being fixed."

"But what good is that going to do us?" broke in the sheriff.

"Just let me finish. I know that there are three or four sticks of dynamite at the sawmill, that were part of the lot bought to blast away the stumps where the mill and camp shacks were built. With what wire I have in my pack, and some of the batteries from my wireless, I can rig up a small mine at the side of the log hut, where there is no window. The shield on the truck would be to allow us to get there in safety."

"But wouldn't that be an awful thing to do, Phil?" asked Garry. "We couldn't blow those men up without warning."

"No, that isn't my idea. I would have one of the party carry a flag of truce into the camp and explain to the men what had been done, and give them two minutes to surrender. If they did not, then go ahead and blow her up. Few would be hurt, and those only slightly. The blast would make a breach in the wall through which we could wage a more even battle, if it comes to an actual fight. But I think the fear of the dynamite would be enough to do the trick. Besides, we could promise that the lumberjacks would be allowed to go in peace; only

the principals would be held. If those jacks were the kind that would play traitor to the camp they were working for, they would double cross Barrows to save their own skins."

"By gosh, boy, I believe you have struck the very idea. At any rate, it's worth a trial. I'll go with you in the truck with some of the men, and leave the deputy here with the others."

The plan was put into execution, and the truck made a dash over the uneven ground past the bunkhouse. A volley of shots greeted them as they tore past, and two of the men uttered exclamations of pain. Fortunately they had only the merest flesh wounds, which Phil bound for them with a small first aid bandage that he had in his pocket.

The barrier was built in record time at the sawmill, and Phil rescued the dynamite from its hiding place. He had feared for a moment that it might have been removed, but evidently in the haste of fortifying themselves in the bunkhouse, no one of the enemy had thought of it.

The return to the bunkhouse then started. When within a striking distance of it, the truck was turned around and, throwing his clutch into reverse, the driver skillfully backed it towards the log house.

Several shots were fired, then there was a silence. Evidently those inside the building were at loss to understand what this peculiar form of attack meant.

Phil knew that his job would be a perilous one, but he knew his duty was do what he had planned. The barrier was raised up and he slipped to the ground. He felt a measure of safety in the thought that the enemy could see what was going on, and would be unlikely to send spies out, since the men of the posse in the other truck could pick them off if they came out.

Phil raided his radio set for the necessary wire, and fixed the dynamite against the log house. There was only one detonator left, and Phil was not sure it was a good one, but he felt so certain that there would be no need of setting it off that he did not particularly care.

His plan was for the man who bore the flag of truce to promise safe conduct for one man to go and look at the arrangement and then go back and tell the others that it was so. The inspector would be under cover of the rifles of the posse all the time, so would have no chance of wrecking the dynamite mine.

When it was finally in place, he gave the order for the truck to back away slowly, paying out the wire that was to be used to set off the detonator from the battery at the other end if the need really arose.

Garry then volunteered to act as the truce bearer, but here King stepped in.

"I've been athinkin' that you shouldn't go. Suppose they once got you in the shack; they could send a man out and tell us that they would harm you if you didn't give orders to git out o' the way. They know that your pa would rather lose the whole camp than have you harmed. Now with me it would be different; they'd know that I didn't count for much with you folks, I'd be like one o' the sheriff's men only, and could bargain better. Better let me go, only promise if anythin' happens to me you'll take care of my baby."

The crude logic of the old timer appealed to them all except Garry, who felt that he should take the danger, since Phil had done his share in braving bullets to fix the charge.

However, the sheriff decided the matter, and since he was the real head of the posse and the law representative of the county, his decision went.

One of the men produced a white handkerchief and tied it to a stick. Then holding the flag of truce aloft, King, the squatter, headed for the log house. The posse held their breaths for a moment, thinking that those in the shack would fear a trick and shoot him; but he advanced in safety and they saw the door of the shack open long enough to admit him.

When King arrived at the shack, he was met by Barrows, who demanded to know what message

was sent. In a few words King told them, then he added some words of his own. These were directed to the lumberjacks. King spun a yarn out of whole cloth and told the jacks, who by this time were almost ready to desert the ship, that another posse was on the way.

Barrows was for disregarding the message as a trick, but King clinched the argument by offering immunity to all the lumberjacks except the bosses and camp officers. They demanded that one of their number go and see if the dynamite was really there.

Barrows and his lieutenants were not stong enough to cope with the lumberjacks, and it was finally agreed that one lumberjack and the red headed cookee go and inspect the blasting apparatus. Each faction—for there were two now in the log house—insisted on having a representative sent, for neither was willing to trust the word of the other. King agreed to remain behind as a hostage for the safety of the messengers.

The two set out on their quest, and in a few minutes were back, post haste.

"It's there, boss; enough to blow us all into the next world," gasped the cookee, who was now frightened half to death.

His words being corroborated, the lumberjacks insisted on an immediate surrender. Barrows saw

that the jig was up, and he ordered an evacuation. Jean LeBlanc's face was livid, and he spat out a torrent of abuse at Barrows. But for all his braggadocia, Barrows was a coward under the skin, and he saw there was nothing to be gained by a fight except a longer prison term. Even now he was figuring on bargaining with Mr. Boone for his freedom, by giving away the interests who had hired him to do their dirty work.

Once outside the door, they found the guns of the men in the trucks trained on them, and they were marching quietly to be disarmed and probably bound, when suddenly, with a loud scream of defiance, Jean LeBlanc turned and bounded away with the speed of a stricken deer. A dozen shots flew after him, and one must have struck him, for they heard him give a screech of pain, then he reached the sanctuary of the woods, and dodging for safety from tree to tree dashed for the lake. Three of the men took after him, but he had taken them by such great surprise when he fled, that he got a flying start.

LeBlanc reached the lake and dived in. He had seen at the same moment as the men who were following, the one chance to save his hide. The motor boat had been repaired, and in it were three or four of the men concerned in the timber thefts. Among them was Jean's brother Baptiste.

Swimming under water, the halfbreed made for the craft. The men in the launch opened fire on the pursuers. A rope was thrown to Jean by his brother, which he grasped, and then without taking the time to haul him aboard, the boat put about and made for the other side of the lake.

Shot after shot was exchanged, but LeBlanc, as well as those in the motor boat, seemed to bear charmed lives.

Once again, Jean LeBlanc had foiled justice and made his escape.

The chagrined pursuers returned to the late scene of hostilities, and found that order had been restored. The lumberjacks who had been promised immunity had been disarmed and herded together, waiting the word to leave the camp.

The ringleaders had been tied up to prevent any more escapes, and Mr. Boone and Dick, together with the other prisoners, had been removed from the stifling air of the storehouse.

Warm was the greeting between father and son and between the chums who were together once again, unharmed and happy. After the greetings were over, the traitorous lumberjacks were ordered to get their packs and leave within fifteen minutes under the guidance of the posse, while the prisoners were put on the trucks to be taken to the county jail.

"So ends the battle of Boone's camp, and all the excitement. My boys, I can't tell you how proud I am of you; but had I known the perils that were in store for you, I would never have started you on this mission. But you have covered yourselves with glory, and I'm proud of you. Now I must get a manager that will serve my interests, get this camp going and do what I can to try and retrieve what I have lost through the rascally Barrows. I am afraid that I am financially hurt unless we can bring Carson to book and make him stand this loss."

"With our evidence I think you can," said Garry. "And now what would you give for a real manager that would serve you and no one else?"

"I don't know, but I would give almost anything in reason for such a man."

"Then," said Garry, "there's your man," and he pointed to Art Howells.

Garry's father heartily agreed.

"Now," said Mr. Boone, "I'd like to get a look at this hermit of yours."

The boys looked around for the old man, but, mysterious as ever, he had disappeared!

CHAPTER XIX

CONCLUSION

So the quest of the boys to discover the Timber Thieves was ended. Mr. Boone hailed Garry's suggestion with delight, and Howells, who protested that he had done nothing to deserve the big promotion, was installed as camp manager, with the faithful lumberjacks as a nucleus, to get the camp going full blast again.

"And you can depend, Moose Boone, on our doing everything we can to make up for what has happened before," one of the old timeres shouted.

Only one remained to be rewarded for his help. That was King, the squatter. Mr. Boone immediately agreed when Garry told him of the promise that had been made, and offered to send some food and clothes to Misery Camp.

A suggestion by Dick proved good. He asked why the Misery Camp men could not be hired to take some of the places left vacant by the men who

had turned traitor. This was put to King and he thought it over a minute.

Then he said:

"Squatters hain't lazy; it's just that every man's hand is turned against 'em because they haven't got homes and land o' their own; but you people seem different. I'll have all the men here in a couple o' days, ready to go to work and earn a livin'."

It took some time for all to tell their stories. Since Garry and Phil had worked separately from Dick, they had to tell him all that befell them since the evening they had left to go and visit the scene of the timber stealing; and Dick was made to tell how he had become a captive.

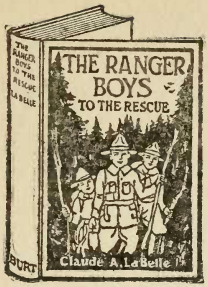
In the telling of their stories to each other, the whole story was unfolded to Mr. Boone, and at the end of the stories he again congratulated them on the successful way in which they had carried out his mission.

"Now I suppose it's back to the patrol on Sourdehunq," said Garry. "We have forgotten for some time that we are Rangers, and we still have a month or so to work for the protection of the forests. It will seem kind of quiet there after all this excitement, for I don't believe that much can happen there now."

But further adventures were in store for the boys—how they were given another mission to

accomplish; the great good fortune that came to Phil; the explanation of the mystery that surrounded the hermit, and the final reward for their summer's work. All will be told in the next and last book of the Ranger Boys series, entitled, "THE RANGER BOYS AND THEIR REWARD."

THE END



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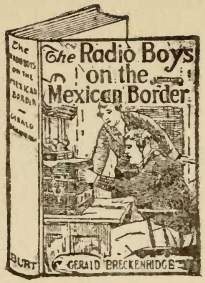

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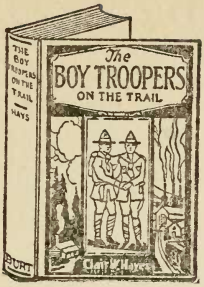

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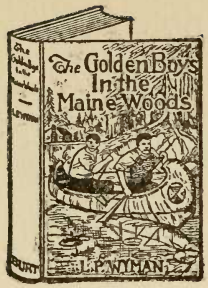

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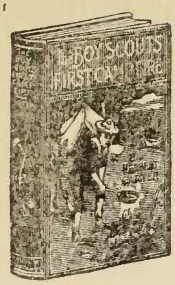

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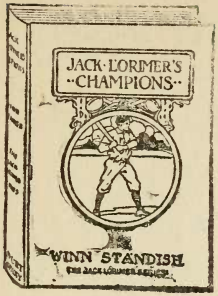

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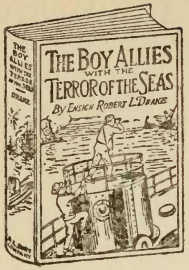

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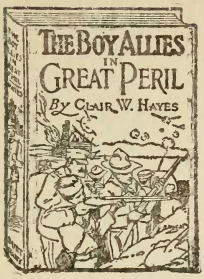

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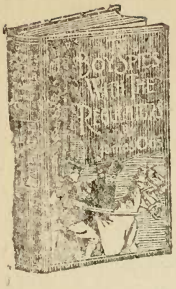

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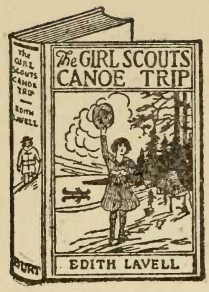

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